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ABSTRACT

California's charter-school legislation took effect January 1, 1993, and authorized the creation of up to 100 charter schools. By the end of the year, 44 charter schools were either operating or being planned. This document offers an initial look at California's charter schools. A total of 34 schools responded to a survey of the state's 44 charter schools, a 77 percent response rate. One-half of the responding schools were located in metropolitan communities or districts. Findings indicate that: (1) districts resisted charter schools that sought independence; (2) metropolitan schools faced difficult obstacles, which ranged from lack of support from key district players to resistance to teachers' union and obstructive local rules; (3) most schools were associated with teachers' unions, but relationships were strained; (4) parents were active in many charter schools, especially the newly started ones; (5) at-risk students were served by metropolitan charter schools; (6) charter schools had limited, but perceptible impact; and (7) the schools challenged the notion of no-cost reform. Some reasons why more charter schools are not being planned include lack of startup money, accountability issues, the negotiable state-school district relationship, district restrictions, and teacher resistance. Recommendations are: provide financial support to charter schools from public agencies and private organizations; set aside funds to provide technical support to charter schools seeking assistance; clarify charter schools' legal status; and support studies of innovative practices in charter schools. The appendix contains a copy of the charter school survey and charter school district survey. (LMI)

ED 373 444

Vision and Reality

A FIRST-YEAR LOOK AT CALIFORNIA'S CHARTER SCHOOLS

MARCELLA R. DIANDA AND RONALD G. CORWIN

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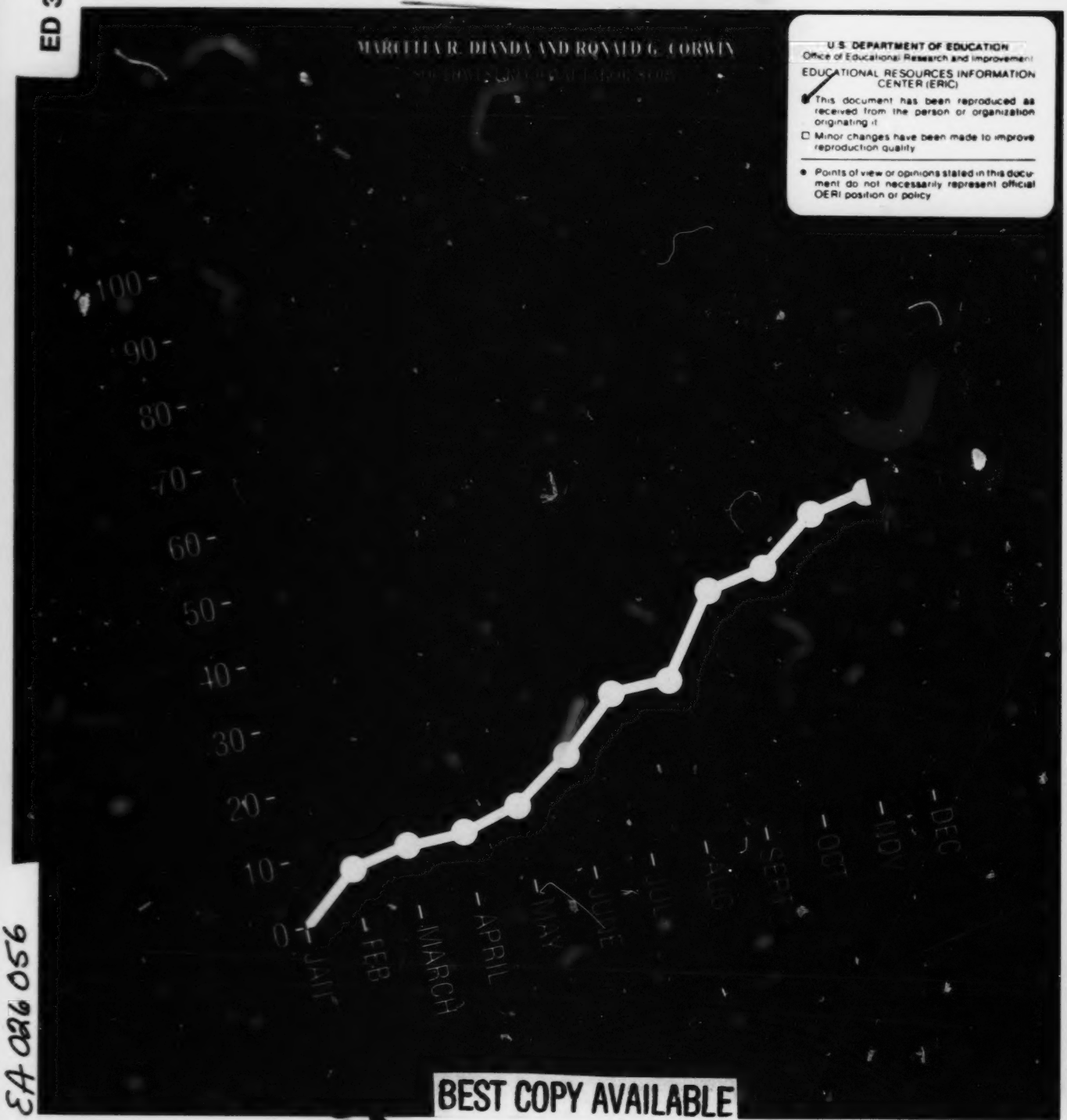

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VISION AND REALITY

A First-Year Look at California's Charter Schools

Marcella R. Dianda and Ronald G. Corwin
Southwest Regional Laboratory

May 1994

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The Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL) is a nonprofit, public educational agency that exists to address challenges resulting from changing demographics and increasing numbers of at-risk children in the Metropolitan Pacific Southwest. The Laboratory addresses its mission by engaging in research, development, evaluation, training, technical assistance, and policy analysis.

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PREFACE

California's charter-school legislation took effect Jan. 1, 1993, and authorized the creation of up to 100 charter schools. By the end of the year, 44 charter schools either were operating or being planned. Since then, four additional schools have been chartered. After one year, it is too early to evaluate how well California's charter schools are performing or to draw any definitive conclusions about the state's charter-school movement. However, because charter schools are promoted as bold experiments necessary for fundamental reform, it is important to track their evolution. After a year, we can offer an initial look—an early report card on California's charter schools.

The information in this report was gathered from a survey the Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL) administered to all the state's charter schools in late fall 1993. Thirty four schools, or 77%, returned completed surveys to SWRL.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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THE CHARTER-SCHOOL CONCEPT

Since the passage of the first charter-school law in Minnesota in 1991, interest in charter schools has grown dramatically. To date, 10 states have enacted legislation authorizing some version of such schools, and at least 16 others are considering charter-school laws (NCSL, 1994; Olsen, 1994; New York State Department of Education, 1994). At the national level, charters are included in the Clinton Administration's education agenda (Kolderie, Lerman, & Moskos, 1993).

Why all the interest in charter schools? According to advocates, the charter-school concept promises "to invent a new kind of public school: innovative, flexible, and responsive to the special needs of students and their families" (Kolderie et al., 1992, p. 130). Charter schools promise to inject innovation, improvement, choice, and competition into the nation's public schools without additional state or federal funding.

Charter Schools Viewed as Independent, Innovative Schools

At the heart of the charter-school movement is the argument that charter schools are positioned to become innovative because they are freed from most of the rules and regulations that have presumably prevented public schools from innovating (e.g., Chubb & Moe, 1990; Hart, 1993; Kolderie et al., 1992). Instead of being subject to regulatory control, each school operates under the terms of a charter or contract with a sponsoring agency (e.g., a local school board, county board of education, state board). Within broad parameters established by charter-school laws, each school's charter spells out the outcomes against which the school is held accountable and how those outcomes will be measured, methods of school governance, and the policymaking and decisionmaking roles of parents and teachers. Ideally, charter schools also enjoy operational independence from their sponsoring agencies so they can make the curricular, managerial, and fiscal decisions needed to meet the terms of their charters.

Ray Budde's release of *Education by Charter: Restructuring School Districts* (1988) stimulated much of the interest in charter schools. Budde's original model envisioned a "school-within-a-school" formed by a group of teachers who would be given autonomy and flexibility to design their own program. More expanded conceptions include newly started schools, existing schools that convert to charter status, and in some states, entire school districts in which all schools become charter schools.

Charter Schools Enjoy Freedom in Exchange for Accountability

Charter schools are exempt from most of the state codes that apply to public schools in exchange for agreeing to be held accountable for publicly established outcomes. In this way, the schools are accountable to their clients—students, parents, and, more generally, taxpayers. Each school's charter spells out measurable student-learning outcomes and operating procedures the school will meet. Failure to do so can result in revocation of the charter. And there are still controls. In particular, charter schools must be tuition free, nonsectarian, nonselective in admissions, and nondiscriminatory. If they receive federal funds, they must meet the monitoring and reporting requirements associated with expending those funds.

Charter Schools Are Politically Appealing Schools of Choice

Ideally, charter schools expand the educational choices in a community. First, they make it possible for someone other than the local school board to try out different forms of public education. In nearly all states, a wide range of individuals and groups is eligible to develop a charter-school petition. Second, each charter school competes for students and the public funds that flow with them. Parents choose to enroll their children in the school and they are free to remove their children if they are not satisfied.

On a broader policy level, charter schools provide the states a way to offer parents choices within the public sector without becoming mired in "the political quicksand" of using public funds for private schools (Kolderie, 1994, p. 103). Private schools cannot seek charter status. Charter laws often allow private citizens and organizations to fund and to be involved in developing and operating charter schools, but once the schools are chartered, they must adhere to legal codes that preserve their public character.

In that respect, charter schools are a viable alternative for state legislators faced with educational-voucher proposals. For example, the California legislature passed and sent two charter bills to the governor for his signature as a widely publicized campaign was underway to qualify a voucher initiative for a statewide ballot (Corwin & Dianda, 1993). The voucher proposal was voted down by a two-to-one margin two months before the state's charter-school law took effect.

Charter Schools Viewed as Providing Low-Cost Reform

Charter schools have caught the imagination of school reformers around the nation for various reasons, not the least of which is the promise they will innovate using existing resources. In most cases, charter schools do not receive additional state or federal

funding. Instead, states either fund them directly from current resources, or the schools receive a portion of the funds already available to their districts. Because charter schools hold out the prospect of educational improvement at no additional cost, they are especially attractive in tight fiscal times. For financially pressed state policymakers, charters offer a way to keep educational reform and restructuring alive.

Summary

Four concepts undergird the charter-school movement: low-cost innovation, accountability, regulatory freedom, and school choice. Charter schools promise reform without the expenditure of additional funds. In addition, charter schools promise innovation and accountability for students' learning in return for freedom from many of the rules and regulations to which public schools normally adhere. Charter schools also offer parents and students another educational option, but this choice is restricted to public schools, effectively avoiding the pitfalls of vouchers. Charter schools' increasing popularity, exemplified by federal initiatives and the number of states that either have introduced or passed charter laws, suggests the vision advanced by advocates has wide appeal. Will charter schools meet this vision? It is too early to tell. As the charter-school movement has grown, the notion of what a charter school is has expanded, allowing for variation across states.

CALIFORNIA'S CHARTER LAW

California is the second state to enact charter-school legislation. Its law was signed by the governor in 1992, one year after Minnesota's charter-school legislation took effect. The first year California schools could seek charter status, 1993, was a busy year legislatively around the country. Seven additional states passed charter laws (i.e., Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Mexico, Wisconsin). Also, an unprecedented number of other states introduced charter bills. These included Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Kansas, Louisiana, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Wyoming (Kolderie, 1994; Morrison Institute, 1993).

At this early stage of the charter-school movement, the experiences of each state can shed light on what is possible and probable elsewhere. Several provisions in California's charter law can be instructive to other states starting or contemplating a charter-school program. In this section, we lay out the parameters of California's charter law. Later sections show how the initial charter applicants fit within the range of options contained in the legislation.

Legislation Establishes Broad Parameters

California's charter law provides an opportunity for anyone in a local community (except a private school) "to establish and maintain [elementary and secondary] schools that operate independently from the existing school district structure as a method to accomplish all the following [goals]:

(a) improve pupil learning;

(b) increase learning opportunities for all pupils, with special emphasis on expanded learning experiences for pupils who are defined as academically low achieving;

(c) encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;

(d) provide parents and pupils with expanded choices in the types of educational opportunities that are available within the public school system; and

(e) hold the schools established under this part accountable for meeting measurable pupil outcomes, and provide the schools with a method to change from a rule-based to a performance-based accountability system." (SB 1448, Section 47601, 1992)

Educators, parents, groups of teachers, community members, and nonprofit organizations are eligible to seek charter status. Each charter must address educational and procedural elements specified in the legislation, but the manner in which each is addressed is left to the petitioners.[1]

As in the majority of other states with charter laws, existing schools, schools-within-schools, and newly created schools are eligible to become charter schools in California. Charter schools can be sponsored by local school boards, as is the case in about half the states with charter laws. In addition, county offices of education may sponsor charter schools in California.

Petitioners must secure the signatures of at least 10% of the credentialed teachers in the district to which they submit the charter, or 50% of the teachers at one of the district's schools. These teachers may or may not teach at the charter school once the petition is approved. Their signatures merely indicate that they believe the educational approaches outlined are sound and worth implementing. No more than 10 schools in a single district can be chartered; however, the legislation contains a special

provision for a school district to convert all its schools to charter schools.

California Law Shifts Control for Reform to the Local Level

Local school boards have more discretion and authority over charter schools in California than in any other state with charter legislation. In fact, the provisions related to exclusive local oversight run counter to the prevailing legislative trend around the country. The charter-school laws passed in other states in 1993 significantly enlarge, rather than reduce, the role of state agencies (Kolderie, 1994). By shifting the locus of control to local communities and their boards of education, California's charter law provides for a locally determined and administered process to restructure schools and to try out innovative educational approaches. It also thrusts local communities, local school boards, and county offices of education into new and unfamiliar roles.

The local school board either approves or rejects the charter petition, and it has a great deal of discretion in setting conditions for approval. As part of its review, it may impose unlimited requirements in addition to those specified in the law. For example, it may require the petitioner to provide information about the proposed operation and potential effects of the school, the potential civil liability effects on the school and district, and the manner in which administrative services are to be provided. The local board also sets the duration of the charter, within the five-year maximum limit specified in the legislation and renewable for up to five years.

If a local board rejects a petition, the petitioners can appeal to the county board of education, which convenes a review panel. The review panel determines whether the local board failed to consider the charter request appropriately or acted arbitrarily in denying the petition. The review does not extend to the substance of the petition. Other states either have no appeals procedure or allow schools to appeal to the state board of education.[2]

Most importantly, the local school board retains liability for the charter schools in its district. The law stipulates that a charter school is under the exclusive control of the local board of education or county office, which also are eligible to sponsor charter schools. The law also vests with local boards the responsibility for monitoring each school's progress and holding it accountable for fulfilling the terms of its charter. All charters include provisions for financial, as well as programmatic, review by local boards. The local board also must approve any changes

in the petition, and it may revoke a charter at any time if a school: commits a material violation of any of the conditions, standards, or procedures set forth in the petition; fails to meet or pursue any of the student outcomes identified in the petition; fails to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management; or violates any provision of law. The local board's decision is final.

A charter school may seek a continuing relationship with its sponsoring district by "buying back" certain services (e.g., maintenance, insurance, payroll, transportation). The board, in turn, has the right to establish costs and to be paid for services the charter school purchases. The district retains ownership of any facility a charter school occupies unless it agrees to sell the building to the charter school. It also may charge the charter school rent (CSBA, 1992).

State Agencies Have Limited Oversight in California

The locally developed and administered focus of California's charter law casts state education agencies in unfamiliar roles. In contrast to charter legislation in other states, there is no evaluative oversight by California's State Board of Education and the California Department of Education (CDE). California's state-level education agencies do not approve charter petitions, hear appeals from unsuccessful petitioners, nor provide technical assistance to charter schools. In other states, the state assumes one or more of these roles with respect to charter schools. A major exception in California is that school districts seeking charter status for all their schools must obtain approval from the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education.

The California State Board of Education, and through it, the CDE, is responsible for verifying that the charter petitions it receives contain the appropriate signatures, have been approved by the local school boards, and address all required legislative provisions. The State Board then assigns a number to completed charter petitions in the order they are submitted. The law specifies that no more than 100 charter schools may operate at one time, but additional schools may petition the state for a waiver of that restriction. There is no time period within which schools must seek charter status, but the legislation requires the state to review the charter schools approach and to report to the legislature by Jan. 1, 1999.

When the first set of approved petitions was filed with the State Board of Education in early 1993, the full scope of the state's authority was under debate. The CDE briefly delayed action on initial applicants (i.e., assigning a charter school

number) while waiting for the schools to supply additional information on how they planned to measure student outcomes, ensure the school's enrollment represented the broader community's demographics, and meet other provisions of the law. The delay raised concerns about the possibility that the state was seeking a role in substantive review and quality control. This has not been the case as local school boards have filled this function as the legislation intended.

However, one responsibility the state has, and probably will continue to have, is clarifying the legislation. For example, the schools chartered in 1993 turned to the CDE when problems arose, most notably over unresolved issues concerning public-school funding formulas.

Charter Schools Negotiate Autonomy And Employees' Rights

Although designed to create schools that operate independently from existing school district structures, California's law does not specify whether charter schools are legally autonomous. Unlike most other states, the question of a school's autonomy rests on specific provisions in its charter as negotiated with the sponsoring agency. Each school, with its sponsoring district, must work out specifics related to the school's legal, operational, and fiscal autonomy.

In addition, discretion over staffing and collective bargaining is considerably broader than in most other states. California permits noncertified teachers to teach in a charter school and to choose whether its staff will operate under the terms of locally bargained employee contracts. Every charter must, however, specify how staff members will be covered by the state teachers' retirement and public employees' retirement systems, or federal social security. And, it must describe the specific rights of charter-school employees who leave the sponsoring district to work in a charter school and any rights those employees may have to return to the district.

A charter school may choose not to bargain, it may become its own bargaining unit, or it may follow the terms of locally negotiated employee contracts. In addition, California's law does not require charter schools to employ certified teachers. Instead, teachers hired by a charter school are bound by terms and conditions of employment specified in the charter.

Given these provisions, it is not surprising that the state's four education employees' unions—California Teachers Association, California School Employees Association, California Federation of Teachers, and California State Council Service Employees International Union—opposed the legislation.

Money Is Not Provided for Planning, Start Up, Or Technical Assistance

California does not provide additional funds to support planning or start-up costs. So far, only New Mexico provides charter schools with small planning grants. Indeed, financial assistance seems to run contrary to the charter-school idea as it is developing in this country.

The implicit, though obvious, assumption is that educational reform can be accomplished without additional cost to taxpayers. The situation is different in Great Britain, home of the longest-running charter-school experiment. Grant-maintained schools in that country receive generous seed grants, enabling them to plan their programs and restructure their staffs, as well as allocate annually for capital structural repairs. One reason schools seek charter status is to gain access to these financial resources not otherwise available to them (Wohlstetter & Anderson, 1994).

As some of California's charter schools struggled to get underway, criticisms surfaced about the lack of state-provided technical assistance or special monies that would allow the schools to purchase technical support services from other sources. The schools seemed to need assistance on a variety of technical matters. These ranged from exploring legal and organizational options and determining school funding entitlements *vis-á-vis* sponsoring districts, to developing and measuring meaningful student outcomes, and accessing innovative and appropriate curricula and instructional approaches. Without such support, some fear that charter schools will not live up to their promise (Premack & Diamond, 1994).

California Gives Priority to Petitioners Serving Academically Low Achievers

Last but not least, one of the goals of California's legislation is to increase learning opportunities for academically low-achieving students. While the legislation does not require schools to serve low achievers, it directs sponsors to give preferential consideration to charter petitions that target these students. In practice, this means that local school boards may or may not use this factor in deciding to support a petition. This legislative provision is not unique to California's charter law. About half the existing charter laws target academically at-risk students.

Summary

California's charter law is different from most other states in three key respects. First, California has established a locally administered system that approves and monitors charter schools. This means state education agencies, which still play major roles in quality control and oversight in other education programs, have limited responsibility over these matters. It also means that local school boards and school district central offices are cast in

new and unfamiliar roles. At the same time, California's charter law does not mandate complete autonomy from the school's local sponsors. Second, each school in California must decide if it wishes to be autonomous, define what that means in concrete terms, and negotiate with its local sponsor. How schools define their status, initially and over time, is an important dimension of California's charter-school movement. Third, California's charter law provides schools with the opportunity to control employee-related issues that have traditionally been the province of local employee unions, but against the backdrop of the state employee unions' opposition to the charter law.

In addition, California's charter law contains two provisions commonly found in other states. Existing schools can convert to charter status and the law encourages local school boards to approve plans from petitioners who intend to serve academically at-risk students.

All of these provisions were reflected to varying degrees in the schools chartered in 1993, beginning with the kinds of schools that sought charter status.

RESPONDING CHARTER SCHOOLS AND DISTRICTS AT A GLANCE

Southwest Regional Laboratory (SWRL)[3] mailed surveys to California's first-year charter schools, and their sponsors, in late fall 1993. At that time, 44 schools had received charter numbers from the state and were sponsored by 27 local agencies. With one exception, all the sponsors were school districts (see Table 1). The exception was the El Dorado County Office of Education, which sponsored one charter school.

We received completed surveys from 34 charter schools (77%) and 21 charter sponsors (78%).[4] School-level respondents were the individual at each charter school who was designated as the school's primary contact. In most cases, these individuals either were school principals or, in the case of new-start, or newly founded, schools, staff members in charge of planning activities. The superintendent (district or county) or his or her designee completed the surveys of the sponsoring agencies. In the larger districts, we generally surveyed an assistant superintendent, or a manager in the curriculum division, who was given primary responsibility for overseeing charter schools. Throughout the report, we refer to school-level respondents as "schools" and to district-level respondents as "districts."

Geographically, the 34 responding schools fell into three clusters: (a) a Southern California cluster, dominated by nine charter schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) (n = 16); (b) a Bay Area cluster that included schools

in Oakland and San Francisco ($n = 9$); and (c) a Northern California cluster that included Sacramento and a few nearby districts, and then fanned out to more rural sections of the state ($n = 9$).

Table 1
Sponsoring Agencies and Charter Schools Completing SWRL Survey

	Responses		Demographics		
Sponsoring agencies	Districts	Schools	Charter schools	Location	County
Bear Valley Unified	1	1	1	Small town	San Bernardino
Bennett Valley Unified	0	0	1	Small town	Sonoma
Cotati-Rohnert Park Unified	1	1	1	Small town	Sonoma
El Dorado County	1	0	1	Small town	El Dorado
Elk Grove Unified	1	1	1	Metropolitan	Sacramento
Folsom-Cordova Unified	1	1	1	Small town	Sacramento
Grass Valley Unified	1	1	1	Rural	Nevada
Los Angeles Unified	1	9	9	Metropolitan	Los Angeles
Morongo Unified	1	1	1	Small town	San Bernardino
Natomas Unified	1	0	1	Small town	Sacramento
Oakland Unified	1	1	1	Metropolitan	Alameda
Pajaro Valley Unified	0	0	1	Small town	Santa Cruz
Piner-Olivet Union Elementary	1	1	1	Small town	Sonoma
Pioneer Elementary	0	1 *	2	Small town	Kings
Placerville Union	1	1	1	Small town	El Dorado
Ready Springs Union	1	1	1	Rural	Nevada
Round Valley Unified	1	1	1	Rural	Nevada
Sacramento City Unified	0	1	1	Metropolitan	Sacramento
San Carlos Elementary	1	0 **	1	Small town	San Mateo
San Diego Unified	1	2	2	Metropolitan	San Diego
San Francisco Unified	0	1	2	Metropolitan	San Francisco
San Lorenzo Valley Unified	1	1	1	Rural	Santa Cruz
Santa Barbara Unified	1	2	2	Metropolitan	Santa Barbara
Sonoma Valley Unified	0	1	1	Small town	Sonoma
Twin Ridges Elementary	1	1	1	Rural	Nevada
Victor Valley High	1	1	1	Small town	San Bernardino
West Park Unified	0	0 ***	1	Metropolitan	Fresno
Western Placer Unified	1	3	5	Small town	Placer
Total	21	34	44		

* This is a districtwide charter that converted both its schools to charter schools. A district administrator completed a portion of the school survey for both schools.

** Although assigned a charter number, this school was in a planning phase. The district completed a district survey.

*** The school received its charter designation too late in the year to be included in the study.

We present findings for schools grouped according to two dimensions—location and type of charter school. The first dimension groups schools according to the community in which they are located: metropolitan, small town, or rural (see Table 1). Metropolitan schools either were located in districts with enrollments of at least 12,000 students or in communities with 100,000 or more residents. The smallest district in this group was Santa Barbara Unified; the largest was LAUSD. The small-town designation, the broadest in the sample, applies to communities between 10,000 and up to 100,000 people, or district enrollments of more than 1,000 but less than 12,000. The smallest district in this group was Piner-Olivet; the largest was Folsom-Cordova. Rural schools are located in communities of fewer than 10,000 people and district enrollments of less than 1,000 students. The largest district was Western Placer Unified; the smallest was Twin Ridges Elementary. Among the 34 responding schools, half (17) were in metropolitan areas (see Table 2).

The second dimension by which schools were grouped is by school type: existing schools that converted to charter status versus new-start schools. Most (26 of 34) were converted, but both new-start and converted charter schools were located in metropolitan, small-town, and rural areas (see Table 2).

Small-Town/Rural Communities Were Overrepresented Among Charter Schools

Even though half the charter schools were located either in small towns (9 schools) or in rural areas (8 schools), small town and rural districts are disproportionately represented in relation to the distribution of California's student population. Put another way, while the state's students are concentrated in metropolitan areas, the first-year charter schools were not. It may be that small districts were less bureaucratized and presented fewer obstacles to petitioners. But, as we will report later, these schools did not seek as much freedom from their sponsoring districts as schools in metropolitan areas. Hence, they may not have been as threatening to their local sponsors.

Most Charter Schools Were Existing Schools

Most of the schools that received charter designation in 1993 (32 of 44) were existing schools that converted to charter status; the rest were new-start charter schools. As we discuss throughout the report, converted and new-start schools differed on a number of key dimensions, including their reasons for seeking charter status and the concerns and challenges they faced. If converted schools continue to dominate in California, lessons gleaned from

them may be of particular interest to other states. Nearly every state allows existing schools to seek charter status.

Table 2
Selected Characteristics of Charter Schools Completing SWRL Survey

Characteristic	Number of schools ($n = 34$)
School location and type	
Metropolitan	17
Converted	12
New-start	5
Small town	8
Converted	6
New-start	2
Rural	9
Converted	8
New-start	1
School level	
Elementary	17
Elementary/middle	7
Middle/junior high	3
Senior high	3
Other	
Comprehensive (pre-k-12)	2
Kindergarten only	1
Secondary (grades 7-12)	1
Number of students enrolled	
0-199	12
200-399	8
400-599	5
600-850	9
Operational status when surveyed	
Operational	27
In planning	7
Relevant funding history	
Previous grant that supported restructuring	4
Competitive grants	7
No previous competitive grants	23

Because charters were granted to so many existing schools, most of the charter schools already were operating in fall 1993 when we surveyed them. Only 7 of the 34 were still in planning stages. With the exception of two schools-within-schools, all the converted schools began operating in 1993. As might be expected, 6 of the 8 new-start schools were still being planned. However, 2 had been operational since September 1993.[5]

Two schools-within-schools were among the respondent sample. These were new schools formed within existing schools and were located in metropolitan areas. In addition, six schools offered parents home-schooling. Five were located in rural communities and one in a metropolitan district. One charter school operated a dropout recovery program in a small town, and, as we discuss later, others targeted their services to specific groups of academically at-risk students. Also, seven of the converted schools had received competitive federal and/or state grants before becoming charter schools; four had received restructuring grants under California's Restructuring Demonstration Schools Program.

Districts Usually Had a Single Charter School

Typically, there was only 1 charter school in each sponsoring district (see Table 1), but there were notable exceptions. LAUSD, in particular, had 9 charter schools at the time of the survey, and it has since added a 10th school. This brings the district to the state-imposed maximum number of charter schools in any district. The San Diego, San Francisco, and Santa Barbara school districts each had 2 charter schools when the survey was conducted. One small district, Pioneer Elementary, had converted both its schools to charter schools. In another small district, Western Placer Unified, 5 of the district's 8 schools converted to charter status.

Elementary Schools Dominated

Most of the respondent schools served elementary school students, as did the total number of schools chartered in 1993. Seventeen schools served students through grade 6, and 7 additional schools enrolled students through grade 8. Only 3 schools served students in grades 9-12. Two schools in the sample, both located in small rural communities, educated students, K-12. With respect to school size, about one third of the charter schools enrolled fewer than 200 students, and two thirds had enrollments under 400.

Summary

Recently the architect of California's charter law, Sen. Gary Hart (D-Santa Barbara), mentioned that his major intent in crafting the

legislation was to provide a vehicle for existing schools that wished to innovate[6]. Most of the schools authorized in 1993 followed this lead. Three quarters were existing schools that converted to charter status. Most were elementary schools, spread across the state. With notable exceptions, most operated as the only charter school in their sponsoring school district. Those exceptions tended to be in large urban districts—Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco.

Although underrepresented compared to the number of students in metropolitan areas, it is nonetheless significant that so many metropolitan schools were among those chartered in 1993. One of the concerns voiced after the law passed was that schools in the state's metropolitan districts might not seek charter status. Some observers surmised that it might be more difficult to develop and move a charter petition through a large school system. Others speculated that the state's largest districts might not encourage charter petitions because of the local oversight responsibilities detailed in the charter law. As we explain in the remaining sections of this report, their experiences in "going" charter and their early experiences as charter schools were different, and by and large, more difficult, than charter schools located in small towns and rural areas.

PETITIONERS' EXPERIENCES IN "GOING" CHARTER

It has been said that seeking charter status from a local school district is like asking permission to secede from the group you want to secede from (Stanfield, 1992). Charter schools can threaten the entities that sponsor them—local school boards—as well as traditional power brokers such as local teachers' unions.

The amount of autonomy available to a particular school depends on the provisions of its individual charter. Local boards can add conditions to those mentioned in the legislation, or they can grant broad discretionary powers to a school. However, in any case, local boards remain liable for the actions of charter schools in their jurisdiction.

Under the law, with the local board's approval, charter schools can assume control of employee-related issues that traditionally have been determined by collective bargaining agreements between a local union and a school district. California's law also leaves to charter schools decisions concerning their participation in collective bargaining and the representation of their teachers by the local teachers' union. In addition, charter schools in California are not required to employ certified teachers.

For some charter schools, 1993 was marked by tension with their sponsoring districts and local teachers' unions. We discuss these tensions throughout the report. We provide some grounding for the reader in this section by reporting on why schools decided to seek charter status and how much local support they received as they developed their petitions.

Reasons for Seeking Charter Status

The schools chartered in 1993 sought charter status primarily to free themselves from confining rules and regulations, with other reasons figuring less prominently in their decision. Table 3 lists their reasons for becoming charter schools. In each case, the schools rated these reasons as very important.

Table 3
Schools' Reasons for Seeking Charter Status

	Type of school		School location		Total
Reasons rated as very important	Converted (n = 26)	New-start (n = 8)	Metro (n = 17)	Small town/rural (n = 17)	(n = 34)
Freedom from specific rules, regulations	24	4	14	14	28
Control curriculum and instruction	18	8	15	11	26
Implement very specific changes	17	7	12	12	24
Encourage people to think about change	18	5	13	10	23
Accelerate changes already underway	18	NA	11	7	18
Form new relationships in the community	12	6	9	9	18
Generally avoid rules, constraints	13	4	10	7	17
Create a totally new entity	5	8	8	5	13
Control school staffing and personnel	7	6	10	3	13
Change the school's authority structure	8	5	7	6	13
Become independent of the district	9	2	8	3	11
Run the school more economically	8	2	5	5	10
Manage the school fiscally	6	3	4	5	9

Note. NA = Not applicable.

Nearly all schools sought freedom from rules and regulations. Nearly all of the schools indicated they had petitioned for a charter to free themselves from specific rules and regulations, and to a lesser extent, as a strategy to avoid overly

burdensome regulations generally. This pattern held for all categories of charter schools (see Table 3)[7].

Table 4 lists examples of rules and regulations from which the schools sought relief.

Table 4

Examples of Obstructing Local Rules and Regulations

School objective	Obstructing rule
• To use a nontraditional form of student assessment based on conferences with parents and portfolios containing examples of students' work.	• District requires schools to assign letter grades.
• To operate as an ungraded school, organized around thematic clusters rather than traditional grade levels, and to group students by their respective abilities in different skill areas.	• District requires schools to organize fourth-sixth grades into subject-matter departments. State requires schools to track student registration based on traditional grade levels.
• To use textbook funds to purchase a range of teacher-selected reading materials and nonprint instructional materials.	• District requires schools to purchase basal readers and textbooks and cannot use funds to purchase materials other than textbooks.
• To maintain site-based management controlled by parents, which has been in effect for many years and which parents like as is.	• For teachers to be eligible for eight days of site-based management training authorized by the district, each school must establish a five-member leadership council and submit a proposal subject to approval by the district and bargaining unit.
• To recruit and retain good principals and teachers. Parents at one of the schools succeeded in replacing the former principal with one they like and now want assurances she won't be transferred.	• The district can assign and reassign principals and teachers without the consent of teachers and parents. Teachers can be "bumped" from schools or laid off.
• To take advantage of the volunteer services of qualified experts to install donated facilities and computer equipment.	• Donated facilities must be installed by the district's vendors, even when local citizens who are qualified to do the work volunteer to do it.
• To shop for the lowest prices in goods and services purchased. One school has identified food-service and janitorial vendors who they believe could do a better job or the same job at lower cost.	• The district hires vendors to provide standard cafeteria and janitorial services for fees that cannot be negotiated by individual schools.
• To introduce flexible schedules.	• The formula for calculating charter-school revenues is based on average daily attendance (ADA), which assumes a traditional classroom structure consisting of a fixed number of minutes and days.

Control over curriculum was more important than fiscal management. Across all school groups, petitions were driven more strongly by reasons related to freedom to manage the school's personnel and programs in new and creative ways than by reasons related to fiscal management. More than two thirds sought to control curriculum and instruction (26 schools).

In most schools, fiscal autonomy and a desire for more economical management were not cited as very important reasons for wanting to acquire charter status. For example, only 10 schools reported they sought charter status to run their schools more economically. And only one quarter (9 schools) wanted to take charge of fiscal management.

Charter status was seen as facilitating change. The majority of schools also said they sought charter status because it facilitated school change by providing an opportunity to: (a) implement very specific changes; (b) encourage staff and others to think about change; or (c) accelerate changes already underway.

New-start schools wanted to create a new entity. As might be expected, all eight new-starts became charter schools to create a totally new entity, but about half the metropolitan charters gave this reason as well.

Independence from the district motivated a sizeable portion of schools, especially metropolitan charter schools. Many more converted schools, and schools in metropolitan areas, sought autonomy from their school districts than other charters. Independence from the district was very important to about one third of the converted schools (9 schools) and about half of the metropolitan charter schools (8 schools). Fewer than one in four schools in small towns and rural areas reported they sought charter status to free themselves from their sponsoring districts.

In addition, compared to other schools, more metropolitan charters (10 of 17) wanted to control staffing and personnel decisions.

Teachers alone, or in combination with school principals, were primarily responsible for initiating the charter idea. With one exception, all the schools identified the person(s) primarily responsible for initiating the idea of seeking charter-school status. In 14 schools, teachers, or teachers in combination with the principal, were responsible (see Table 5). In two other cases,

the idea started with a single teacher. Parents were credited with initiating the charter idea by 3 schools, and they were reported to be part of a teacher or schoolwide group in 9 additional schools.

Table 5
Person(s) Primarily Responsible for Initiating the Charter Idea

Individual or group	Number of schools ($n = 31$)
Teachers	7
Principal and school faculty	7
Teachers and parents	6
Principal, school faculty, and parents	3
Parents	3
Superintendent and school staff	2
A single teacher	2
Principal	1

Local Support for Charter Petitions

Whether it involved converting an existing school or founding a new school, "going" charter never was unconditional. It depended on the local school board's and district's capacity and willingness to provide resources and support. And it depended on the willingness of the local teachers' unions to at least lend tacit approval to the creation of schools under a piece of legislation their state-level organizations did not endorse. Support from local teachers' unions during the petition process was modest, which is not unexpected given the state teacher unions' opposition to the charter law.

The schools reported that most districts were moderately supportive as they developed their charter petitions. But the districts did not aggressively help them and in some cases, the districts were hostile. Hostility was related to the degree of independence the schools sought from their respective districts.

Superintendents were the most supportive of charter petitions. Overall, the schools reported that superintendents were the most supportive of the district representatives (24 schools), with school-board support following closely (22 schools), and support among the central-office staff a distant third (16 schools). This trend was consistent across all categories of charter schools, with

support especially high among schools in small towns and rural communities (see Table 6). In at least 9 schools, the superintendent provided leadership in developing the charter petition (not shown in tables).

Table 6

Schools' Reports of Local Support for Their Charter Petitions By School Location

	Type of school		School location		Total
	Converted ($n = 25$)	New-start ($n = 8$)	Metro ($n = 17$)	Small town/rural ($n = 16$)	($n = 33$)
Supportive individual or group	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)	*n* (%)
Superintendent	19 76	5 63	11 65	13 82	24 73
Local school board	17 68	5 63	8 47	14 87	22 67
District central office	13 52	3 38	6 35	10 63	16 48
Local teachers' union	11 44	3 38	4 24	10 63	14 42

Central-office staff were least supportive among district representatives. The schools reported that central-office staff in their sponsoring districts less often supported their petition than either the superintendent or the school board. This was especially pronounced in metropolitan areas. While two thirds of the charters in metropolitan areas (11 schools) reported receiving the superintendents' support, only one third (6 schools) said the central-office staff supported them as they developed their charter petitions (see Table 6).

In addition, over three quarters of all the schools (26 of 34) believed their districts factored in potential administrative burdens on central-office staff when considering a charter petition. Nearly half the districts (9 districts) noted this was a consideration (which may be one reason only 5 reported that charter schools have imposed an unreasonable additional administrative burden on central-office staff). Even more districts (16 districts) said they considered possible legal risks when granting a charter (see Table 7).

Local school board support was especially low in metropolitan areas. Differences in local school board support

between schools in metropolitan areas and those in small towns and rural communities were striking. Nearly all the schools in the latter group (87%) reported local-board support for their charter petition compared to only half the metropolitan charter schools (47%) (see Table 6).

Table 7
School Districts' Reports of Operational Practices Concerning Charter Schools

Operational practices among districts	Number of districts ($n = 21$)
Maintains good communication with charter schools	19
Cuts through red tape for charter schools	17
Weighs probable outcomes against legal risks	16
Facilitates what charter schools are doing or planning to do	15
Provides visibility and recognition for charter	14
Adds (or will add) more conditions before granting a charter	10
Awaiting clear guidance from the state about what charters can and cannot do	10
Weighs probable outcomes against administrative burdens when granting a charter	9
Retains liability for charter schools without usual safeguards	6
Assumes additional administrative burden associated with having charter schools	5
At risk of being out of compliance with court rulings due to charter schools	3

Teachers' unions in metropolitan areas were far less supportive than unions elsewhere. The differences in teachers' unions support between metropolitan charter schools and charters located in small towns and rural areas was striking (see Table 6). Nearly two thirds of the small-town and rural charter schools said the local teachers' union supported their charter petitions compared to less than one quarter of the charters in metropolitan areas. Even more striking, 40% of the schools in metropolitan areas (7 schools) reported union opposition to their charter petition compared to half that percentage in small towns and rural areas (21%; 3 schools) (not shown in tables).

Overall, though, local teachers' union support was lower compared to support from superintendents, local boards, or central-office staff. Fewer than half the schools reported their local teachers' union supported their charter petitions (see Table 6).

Districts were least supportive of "break-away" charter schools. Superintendents, school boards, and central-office staff were the most supportive of charter schools that did *not* seek independence from their sponsoring districts (see Table 8). Put another way, their degree of support was inversely related to the importance schools attached to becoming independent.

Table 8
Schools' Reports of Local Support for Their Charter Petition by Self-Reported Importance of Independence

	Schools classified by how important they regarded independence from district						Total	
	Not important ($n = 13$)		Important ($n = 9$)		Very important ($n = 11$)		($n = 33$)	
Individuals/groups providing support	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)
Superintendent	12	92	6	67	6	55	24	73
School board	11	85	7	78	4	36	22	66
District central office	10	77	3	33	3	27	16	49
Average support		85		59		39		63

Compared to schools that were not interested in independence, those for whom it was important were less frequently supported by: (a) the superintendent (55% vs. 92%); (b) the school board (36% vs. 85%); and (c) central-office staff (27% vs. 77%).

In only a few districts were relationships outright hostile. Three superintendents and at least one board were said to oppose petitioners. Three additional superintendents and four local boards were called "reserved," although not opposed (not shown in tables).

"Break-away" charter schools were most often located in metropolitan areas. Eight of the 11 schools for whom independence from their sponsoring district was very important were located in metropolitan areas (the remaining 3 were in small towns.) (see Table 9). The 8 metropolitan charter schools included 5 in LAUSD or about two thirds of the metropolitan charters seeking independence.

Table 9
Schools' Ratings of Importance of Independence By Location

	School location	
Importance of independence	Metropolitan ($n = 16$)	Small town/rural ($n = 14$)
Not important	4	10
Important	5	4
Very important	8	3

Metropolitan charters believed districts added conditions for petitioners. Almost half the charter *schools* reported their sponsoring districts either had added or intended to add more conditions prior to approving charter petitions (see Table 10). The *districts* agreed with this assessment. Ten districts (47%) reported they either added or would add more conditions (not shown in tables). Again, metropolitan charters stood out. Four of the 5 metropolitan districts reported imposing additional requirements (not shown in tables).

Securing start-up funds was a major obstacle for new-start schools. Almost two thirds of the metropolitan-based charter schools (62%) reported difficulty in securing charter-school funding. Far fewer charters based in small towns and rural areas (31%) reported funding concerns of this type.

Funding concerns were greatest among the new-start charters. Six of the eight schools considered securing funding for start up and/or operations to be a major obstacle.

Local teachers' unions were less supportive of schools that sought control over staffing. Charter schools that sought to control staff hiring, and transfers and reassignments were less

likely to receive the support of the local teachers' unions (see Table 11). None of the charter schools that wanted to control hiring received the local teachers' union's support for its charter petition. Unions either were opposed (in three cases) or remained neutral (in five cases) with respect to the petitions, neither lending their support nor openly opposing them. In contrast, almost two thirds of the schools for which such control was less important enjoyed support from the local teachers' unions.

Table 10
Schools' Reports of Additional Conditions Districts Imposed and Start-Up Funding Challenges

	Type of school				School location				Total	
	Converted (n = 25)		New-start (n = 8)		Metro (n = 17)		Small town/rural (n = 16)		(n = 33)	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
District added or will add more conditions for charter petitioners	11	46	4	50	10	62	5	31	15	47
Securing funding is a major obstacle for petitioners	8	38	6	75	10	62	4	25	14	44

District central offices were least supportive of schools seeking fiscal management. Only three charter schools that sought to manage fiscal matters independently of their sponsoring districts reported receiving the support of central-office staff (see Table 12). In contrast, nearly half the schools that did not seek such control reported that the central-office staff supported their charter petitions.

Summary

When charter schools intended to invade existing turf, the affected local interests did not support their charter petition. For example, sponsoring districts withheld support from schools seeking independence, and, in effect, intending to take control of functions previously performed for the school by the district. Local teachers' unions withheld support when charter schools

sought to control staff transfers and reassignments. The central-office staff did not support schools attempting to take charge of fiscal management.

Compared to the schools in small towns and rural areas, "going" charter was especially difficult for schools in metropolitan districts where support for petitions especially was low among the local school boards, district bureaucracy, and local teachers' unions.

Still, in spite of the difficulties faced by independence-minded petitioners, the fact that these charters were approved indicates they were somehow able to strike a balance between asserting independence and completely alienating powerful local interests.

Table 11

Local Teachers' Union Support for Schools Seeking To Hire And Transfer Staff

	Hire staff				Transfer staff			
	Very important		Other importance ratings		Very important		Other importance ratings	
	n	(%)	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)
Supportive local union	0	—	14	61	1	<1	12	48
Opposed local union	3	38	7	30	1	<1	7	22
Neutral local union	5	63	2	9	0	—	7	22

Table 12

Central-Office Staff Support for Schools Seeking Budgetary And/or Fiscal Control

	Manage school fiscally				Control school budget			
	Very important		Other importance ratings		Very important		Other importance ratings	
	n	(%)	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)
Supportive central office	3	10	13	42	2	7	12	43
Opposed central office	3	10	2	6	0	—	5	18
Neutral central office	8	26	2	6	1	4	8	29

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF CHARTER STATUS

The major benefit of charter status that the schools reported—freedom from regulation, especially state rules—was grounded in a specific provision of California's charter law that provided this relief, unequivocally. In contrast, the challenges of charter status, especially for schools in metropolitan areas, were tied to the legislation's permissive provisions, particularly those related to charter schools' autonomy and the representation of their teachers by the local teachers' union. In this section, we begin with findings related to the schools' reports of regulatory relief and move to their reports of operational independence from their sponsoring districts and the schools' relationships with local teachers' unions.

Regulatory Relief

While charter status provided most of the schools with the relief from rules and regulations they sought, they still operated within constraints imposed by a variety of rules, including district regulations, provisions of local employees' contracts, federal regulations, and court rulings. Below, we report on the schools' assessments of how much these rules interfered with planning activities in those schools that were not yet operational and in the day-to-day activities of schools that were up and running.

Schools were freed from state codes. Nearly all schools reported charter status provided relief from state rules and regulations. In fact, only four considered state rules to be a great obstacle to their operations (see Table 13). Still, in view of this and the legislative intent, it is puzzling that five schools were concerned that the state might not give them enough freedom to succeed (not shown in tables). Perhaps they were thinking of possible differences in the way local districts and the CDE interpreted the state's role.

Most charter schools, especially metropolitan charters, were still hindered by district rules. Over half the schools complained that some rules were still interfering with their plans or operations (see Table 13). Many identified district regulations (39%) and union contracts (36%) as major obstacles. These two sources of rules were especially vexing for metropolitan schools. Two thirds complained about district regulations, and nearly half singled out restrictive union contracts as obstacles.

Court rulings were a problem for schools in metropolitan areas. To round out the parameters of the constraints under which the schools operated, we asked them about the extent to

which court rulings and federal rules and regulations had interfered with their efforts to change. Eight schools—all but one in metropolitan areas—said that court rulings had interfered with their plans.

Table 13
Charter Schools' Opinions of Rules and Regulations

	School location				Total	
	Metro (n = 17)		Small town/rural (n = 16)		(n = 33)	
Statements related to rules and regulations	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Some rules are still interfering with planning, operations	10	59	7	44	17	52
District regulations are a great obstacle to charter schools	11	65	2	13	13	39
A restrictive union contract is a great obstacle	8	47	4	25	12	36
Restrictive state rules are a great obstacle	2	6	2	13	4	12
Federal rules, regulations interfered with efforts to change	3	18	1	6	4	12
Court rulings interfered with schools' efforts to change	7	41	1	6	8	24

Summary. Few schools complained about interference from state rules or regulations. However, half—including two thirds of the metropolitan schools—said that some rules were still interfering, especially district regulations and union contracts. In addition, some charters located in metropolitan schools were finding their plans curtailed by court rulings, which of course are not affected by the charter law.

Negotiated Autonomy

One of the arguments driving the charter-school movement is that neither school districts, nor their governing boards, are positioned to promote change. Schools, however, can improve and innovate if they are given the necessary freedom. That latitude includes not only freedom from constraining state rules and regulations, but could ideally extend to fiscal, legal, and operational independence from local school districts.

All states do not grant charter schools autonomy, but most do specify whether charters are to function autonomously.

California does not. Instead, the question of a school's autonomy rests on specific provisions in its charter. Put more bluntly, the question of "who controls what" is left for each school to negotiate with its sponsoring agency.

As we noted previously, local support was much less likely to be forthcoming for charter petitioners seeking independence from their districts, control over their budgets, or the right to manage their schools fiscally. As we discuss below, these problems were exacerbated for some petitioners after they received their charter designation from the state and began to plan their programs and open their doors to students.

Most schools reported good working relationships with sponsors, and half found local teachers' unions cooperative. Nearly all the schools characterized their relationship with the sponsoring school boards as "cooperative." A plurality also found the district administration cooperative, but less than half reported their working relationship with the local teachers' union was cooperative (see Table 14). This was especially true among metropolitan charters and new-start charter schools.

Table 14
Schools' Reports of Cooperative Working Relationships by School Location

	Type of school				School location				Total	
	Converted ($n = 25$)		New-start ($n = 8$)		Metro ($n = 17$)		Small town/rural ($n = 16$)		($n = 33$)	
Cooperation of groups	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
District administration	18	72	5	62	12	71	11	69	23	70
Local school board	20	80	6	75	12	71	14	87	26	79
Local teachers' union	14	56	3	37	7	41	10	62	17	52

About half the charter schools reported their districts carried out activities on the schools' behalf. About half the schools reported the district maintained good communication with them and that someone in the district's central office "cut the red tape" for them (see Table 15).

However, districts could have been more helpful. For example, only one in three schools affirmed that its district's

leadership was committed to facilitating what the school wanted to do and gave the school visibility and recognition.

Table 15
Charter Schools' Reports of Activities That Districts Carried Out On Their Behalf

	School location				Total	
	Metro (n = 17)		Small town/rural (n = 16)		(n = 33)	
District activities	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Maintained good communication with charters	7	41	11	73	18	54
Cut through the red tape for charters	8	47	7	47	15	45
Facilitated charters' operations or planning	4	24	8	53	12	36
Provided visibility and recognition for charters	5	29	6	40	11	33
Encouraged others to adopt charter practices	3	18	6	40	9	27
Liberalized policies related to school restructuring	5	31	3	20	8	26

Charter schools in metropolitan areas received considerably less district assistance than other charters. Compared to the charters located in small towns and rural districts, charters in metropolitan areas reported their districts were less likely to: (a) provide visibility and recognition for the schools (29% vs. 40%); (b) facilitate the schools' planning and operations (24% vs. 53%); (c) maintain good communication with the schools (41% vs. 73%); or (d) encourage others to adopt the charter-schools' practices (18% vs. 40%) (see Table 15).

Schools seeking independence reported less cooperative relationships with sponsoring districts. A desire to become independent of their districts motivated slightly less than one third of the charter schools. These schools tended to be converted schools (vs. new-starts) and metropolitan schools (vs. small-town/rural charters). Schools for which independence was very important less frequently reported they had cooperative working relationships with the local school board and district administration (see Table 16).

Table 16
Schools' Reports of Cooperative Working Relationships by Self-Reported Importance of Independence

	Schools classified by how important they regarded independence from district						Total	
	Not important (n = 13)		Important (n = 9)		Very important (n = 11)		(n = 33)	
Cooperative relationship with:	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)
District administration	8	62	7	78	6	55	21	64
School board	11	85	8	89	7	64	26	76

Metropolitan charters controlled a few more key areas than other charters. Although they tended to have less support as they developed their petitions and less assistance after they were chartered, metropolitan charter schools tended to have more operational control over some decisions than small-town and rural charter schools (see Table 17). The largest difference was control over suspending and expelling students (59% vs. 6%). In general, the differences were not striking, but the prevailing pattern suggests more control in metropolitan districts. For example, metropolitan schools were more likely to control instruction and staff development (100% vs. 75%), student discipline (94% vs. 75%), selection of the principal (82% vs. 56%), and teacher transfers (65% vs. 50%).

Three districts controlled all the areas listed in Table 17. This extensive district control raises questions about what is distinctive about these schools that warrants their designation as charter schools. All three were located outside metropolitan areas. In two other cases, the district and the charter school shared responsibility for each of the areas. Both were in small-town/rural areas. Such collaborative control models did not exist among the metropolitan charter schools.

Charter schools controlled within-school decisions. Most of the charter schools controlled internal decisions over staffing, curriculum and instruction, and student conduct. Eighty percent or more reported controlling the courses offered to students, the kinds of staff development provided to teachers, instructional strategies used in the classroom, grading policies, methods of

assessing student progress, and student discipline or behavior codes (see Table 17). The reader will recall that gaining control over curriculum and instruction was a major reason that schools sought charter status.

Table 17
Charter Schools' Reports of Key Areas They Controlled

	School Location				Total	
	Metro (n = 17)		Small town/rural (n = 16)		(n = 33)	
Areas charter schools controlled	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Instructional approaches and strategies	17	100	12	75	29	88
Staff development	17	100	12	75	29	88
Grading policy	14	82	15	94	29	88
Staff selection and hiring	16	94	12	75	28	85
Methods of assessing student progress	15	88	13	81	28	85
Student discipline/behavior code	16	94	12	75	28	85
Courses students take	15	88	12	75	27	82
Selecting and hiring the principal	14	82	9	56	23	70
Expenditures and purchases	10	59	10	62	20	61
Transferring staff to another school	11	65	8	50	19	58
School budget	9	53	8	50	17	51
Expenditure of categorical funds	7	41	10	62	17	51
Custodial/maintenance services	9	53	6	37	15	45
Rules to suspend or expel students	10	59	1	6	11	33
Personnel services	5	29	5	31	10	30
Liability insurance	5	29	3	19	8	23
Mean number of areas controlled	11		9.2		10.2	

In addition, 70% controlled important aspects of school staffing, including selecting the principal and school staff. However, four of the schools that controlled the selection of teaching staff did not select the principal. All four were in small towns and rural areas.

The schools exercised less control over student conduct and staffing decisions that could have implications for other schools. For example, slightly more than half had the authority to reassign or transfer teachers. Less than one third said they could establish rules regulating student suspension and expulsion. Sponsoring districts retained control over these decisions. However, more

charters in metropolitan areas reported controlling these activities than their small-town and rural counterparts (65% vs. 50% for staff transfers; 59% vs. 6% for student rules). These are large differences; however, transfers and rules governing student expulsions and suspensions may not have been problems in these areas.

Charters had more professional than fiscal control. Recall that only one third of the schools (11 schools) reported they could manage their resources more effectively by taking advantage of the fiscal control available to charter schools (see Table 3). Compared to issues within professional spheres, such as curriculum and instruction or school staffing, fewer schools had fiscal control. Still, about half reported managing their own budgets and controlling expenditures and purchases (see Table 17).

Some schools expected greater fiscal control in the future. As one metropolitan charter-school respondent noted, "At this point, we are asking for minimal fiscal autonomy and maximum curricular, staffing, and governance autonomy." Similarly, a second charter school reported it elected to have the district manage personnel services, facilities maintenance, insurance and liability, as well as utilities, as it phases into fiscal autonomy. A third reported that during the first year of its charter, its prior relationship with the sponsoring district for support services (e.g., legal, accounting, business) remained unchanged, but it will make changes in how and where it seeks these support services in the future. By opting to retain close ties initially, and to restrict their jurisdiction to such traditionally school-based matters as curriculum and instruction, these schools have made a relatively easy transition to charter status.

Compared to other areas, few schools handled their own personnel services (e.g., salaries, medical insurance, vacation leave, retirement benefits). Two thirds decided to contract with their districts for these services. And most relied on their districts for expensive services, such as liability insurance. Only eight reported purchasing liability insurance on their own. Charter schools found liability insurance difficult to obtain, costly, and limited in scope (i.e., excludes claims in the most liability-prone areas) (Premack & Diamond, 1994). Two thirds were covered under their districts' liability insurance policy.

Districts fulfilled oversight requirements. Nearly all the sponsoring districts retained some form of control over the

charters operating in their jurisdictions. The law requires every district to approve revisions to a school's charter and ensure that the school will provide evidence that it is meeting the performance standards specified in its charter. All the districts reported meeting these requirements (see Table 18). In addition, 15 of 21 district approved the schools' annual budgets and any waivers the schools requested from the state. Over half the districts (11 of 21) required the schools to periodically update their charters. Twelve approved all contracts made by the school. Ten districts determined the schools' enrollment capacity. A few (7 districts) also appointed members to the schools' governing board, and 4 even approved governing board members.

With these requirements in place, only 6 districts believed they would be held liable for a school's actions without the benefit of the usual safeguards (see Table 7). However, many still were perplexed about the limits of the state's jurisdiction. Nearly half (10 of 21) indicated they had not received clear guidance from the state about what charter schools can and cannot do. Eight were concerned the state might not give charter schools the freedom needed for their programs to work.

Table 18
Districts' Reports of School Board/District Oversight

	District Location		Total
School board activities	Metro ($n = 5$)	Small town/rural ($n = 16$)	($n = 21$)
Requires evidence school is meeting performance goals	5	16	21
Approves any revisions in a school's charter	5	16	21
Approves an annual budget submitted by a charter school	4	11	15
Approves any waivers a charter school requests	4	11	15
Signs off on all contracts made by a charter school	2	10	12
Requires a charter school to periodically update its charter	3	8	11
Determines how many students attend a charter school	3	7	10
Appoints member of a charter school's governing body	2	5	7
Approves the governing body chosen by a charter school	1	3	4

Summary. While many schools reported a cooperative working relationship with their sponsoring school boards and school districts, and said their districts carried out activities on their behalf, this was not the case among charter schools that sought independence. Half of the independent-minded charters were in metropolitan areas. As a group, the metropolitan charter schools tended to have more operational autonomy than charter schools in small towns or rural districts.

Union Representation and Union Management Relationships

The opportunity for charter schools to experiment with new employment practices is enormous in California. Each charter can claim jurisdiction over staffing issues that traditionally have been the subject of collective-bargaining agreements between a school district and local labor unions—hiring and releasing staff, tenure and transfer decisions, retirement benefits, health insurance, sick and vacation leave, and evaluation procedures. California's law leaves the decision regarding collective bargaining up to the schools as specified in their charters. A charter school may choose not to bargain, it may become its own bargaining unit, or it may follow the terms of locally negotiated employee contracts. In addition, charter schools can employ teachers who are not certified or licensed by the state. As we report in this section, some schools broke traditional ties with the local teachers' union.

Local teachers' unions represented most charter-school teachers. By and large, teachers working in charter schools were covered by agreements bargained between local teachers' unions and sponsoring districts, in many cases with the possibility of waivers (65%; 22 schools) (see the first two options in Table 19). But converted and new-start schools differed on this dimension (see Table 19). Only two new-starts reported their teachers were represented by the local union; four others had not yet decided on the issue of union representation. Also, in one additional new-start school, teachers retained reemployment and tenure rights in the district. Without an explicit right to return to the sponsor district in the school's charter, or elsewhere, teachers would be unemployed if a district were to revoke a school's charter.

In contrast, 80% of the converted schools (20 schools) indicated their teachers were covered by the locally bargained teacher contract. Of these, 8 reported this coverage included the possibility of waiving certain contract provisions if needed. For example, one school negotiated waivers that would give the

school increased control and flexibility in the areas of teacher evaluation and teacher assignment. The school's charter also included provisions to decrease class size and increase teachers' planning time (provided the school secured additional funding for these purposes).

Some schools reported vesting with their governance councils the responsibility to determine the qualifications of part-time, temporary, or short-term personnel hired by schools under a personal services contract. To ensure program quality, others developed written job descriptions for certified and classified staff to augment qualifications set forth in local contracts.

Table 19
Local Teachers' Union Representation of Charter-School Teachers

	Type of school		School location		Total
Teachers' status	Converted ($n = 25$)	New-start ($n = 7$)	Metro ($n = 17$)	Small town/rural ($n = 15$)	($n = 32$)
Covered by locally bargained contract	12	1	6	7	13
Covered, with the possibility of waivers	8	1	5	4	9
Not covered, but retain reemployment rights	1	1	1	1	2
Not covered at all	1	4	3	2	5
Undecided about union representation	3	0	2	1	3

Only two converted schools said their teachers were not covered by the local bargaining agreement. The first operated under the terms of a charter that contained detailed provisions concerning paid legal holidays, release days for illness, personal necessity and staff development, maternity and unpaid leaves, mandatory benefits, retirement and health benefits, and vacation days. The staff sought "opportunity leave" from the district with return rights for up to five years and they retained the right to organize in the future and seek local representation. The second school was a nonprofit, public-benefit corporation that set the terms of employment for its staff. Since the mid-1980s, it had specialized in locating and recovering junior and senior high

school dropouts, or students at risk of dropping out, and providing them with individualized study programs.

Local union support was lukewarm, especially in metropolitan areas. Only one half of the schools (17 schools) said their working relationship with the local teachers' union was cooperative (see Table 20). Another one third (11 schools) characterized it as neutral or mixed. Five schools, including 4 in metropolitan areas, considered the relationship to be adversarial. In 4 of the 5, the local teachers' union opposed the school's charter petition and the relationship with the school continued to be adversarial. In 3, the schools' teachers were covered by the locally bargained contract. The other 2 schools had severed ties with the union and bargained separately with their sponsoring districts.

In general, local teachers' unions were not urging teachers to transfer to charter schools. Only one respondent—a small rural district that converted its two existing schools to charter schools—said the local union actively encouraged teachers to work in charter schools (not shown in tables).

In other cases, the relationship between the schools and local unions was still evolving. While it had improved in seven schools since they developed their charter petition, as mentioned above, two other schools reacted to union opposition by severing ties altogether.

Table 20
Schools' Reports of Their Relationship With Local Teachers' Unions

	School location				Total	
	Metro ($n = 17$)		Small town/rural ($n = 16$)		($n = 33$)	
Relationship	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
Adversarial	4	24	1	6	5	15
Neutral/mixed	6	35	5	31	11	33
Cooperative	7	41	10	63	17	52

Relationships with the local union sometimes evolved in different directions within the same district. For example, seven of the nine LAUSD charter schools did not report substantial union problems. In one of the other two schools, however, the local teachers' union opposed the school's petition, and the school described its current relationship with the union as adversarial even though its teachers were covered under the locally bargained contract. The other school having union problems reacted to union opposition by severing the relationship. Its teachers were not covered by the locally bargained contract, but they retained their tenure and reemployment rights within the district.

More schools agreed with than disagreed with the statement, "A restrictive teachers' union contract is a major obstacle to charter schools" (19 schools or 58% vs. 12 schools or 36%). But even the schools that viewed the contract as an obstacle did not necessarily have a problematic relationship with the union. Only two schools simultaneously characterized the contract as obstructive *and* said their relationship with the union was adversarial. Both were in metropolitan districts.

Summary. While charter schools are not required to be associated with a teachers' union, only 7 of the 34 schools were not covered at all by the local bargaining unit. However, the affiliations seem strained. Relationships with local unions were characterized as less than cooperative by half the schools and as adversarial by one fourth of the metropolitan schools.

Parent Involvement

Because they are schools of choice, charter schools are expected to involve parents in their programs. For example, in California as elsewhere, charter schools are required to involve parents in school governance. Schools reported considerable parental influence. But in a striking number of cases, that influence was coupled with the requirement that parents must participate in school activities.

Parents exercised considerable influence, especially in new-start schools. Most schools (74%) reported that parents exerted more influence over educational programs in charter schools than in other schools in their sponsoring districts. But this was especially true in new-start schools; seven of the eight so indicated (see Table 21). Also, parents were more involved in developing charter petitions in new-start schools than in converted schools. Parents exercised leadership in this area in

five of eight new-starts compared to only one third of the converted schools (not shown in tables).

Our visits and interviews during the first few months after the charter-school law became effective identified two schools in which teachers were concerned about the possibility that parents would usurp some of their authority. However, such tensions were not prevalent in 1993. Only two schools said that teachers' authority was being eroded by parents' increased influence.

Table 21
Schools' Reports of Parent Involvement

Percentage of schools saying the following:	Type of school		School location		Total
	Converted ($n = 26$)	New-start ($n = 8$)	Metro ($n = 17$)	Small town/rural ($n = 17$)	($n = 34$)
Parents have more influence than is typical in district	18	7	12	13	25
Parents, community members are used as instructors	18	7	11	14	25
Parents are required to participate in certain activities	13	6	9	10	19
Parents are required to sign a contract	13	7	8	12	20
Teachers' authority is being eroded by parents' influence	1	1	1	1	2

Most schools cast parents/community members as instructors. Twenty-five schools (74%) reported using parents or community members as instructors (see Table 21). All but one of the new-start schools used or planned to use parents or community members in this capacity. Small-town and rural schools were somewhat more likely to use these individuals as instructors than schools in metropolitan areas (82% vs. 65%).

Most schools required parents' active involvement. Rather than relying exclusively on volunteers, most schools required parents to participate in their programs. Over half (56%) reported that parents must participate in specified school activities or volunteer at school for a specified number of hours (see Table 21).

In addition, most schools required parents to sign contracts specifying the role they would fulfill in supporting their child's learning. Half the converted schools, and all but one of the new-starts, required such contracts (see Table 21). There is a striking difference between metropolitan and other districts in the frequency of contracts. Seventy-one percent of the rural and small-town schools required contracts compared to 47% of the schools in metropolitan areas.

Converted schools built on a strong foundation of parent support. In most cases, parents frequently had volunteered at converted schools before they converted to charters. In more than half of the converted schools, over 30% of the parents had volunteered regularly before the conversion. This rate is exceptionally high. Nationally, voluntarism hovers around 4% (Epstein, 1992). Similarly, in 10 of the converted schools, over 30% of the parents had participated in Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) events regularly. Again, this is high compared to national averages.

Summary. Parents were active in all phases of charter schools. Three fourths of the schools reported that parents had more influence than is typical for the district, and they served as classroom instructors. Moreover, over half the schools required parents to sign contracts obligating them to participate in specified activities.

Charter-School Students

Like a handful of other states with charter-school laws, California directs local school boards to give preference to petitioners who demonstrate ability to provide comprehensive learning experiences to pupils identified as academically low achieving. This priority takes effect only as districts reach their cap of 10 schools and the board is forced to make choices among candidates. Most districts in our sample had only 1 or 2 charter schools, which meant that the districts could accept any application unconditionally unless it chose to impose its own guidelines. Still, we thought it worth asking whether the schools chartered in 1993 were targeting low-achieving students or aiming instead for a broad cross-section of students and families. To obtain a sense of the kinds of students and parents who are, and are not, being served by charter schools, our survey included several items about target population.

As a crude index of low academic achievement, we asked the schools to provide estimates of the percentage of their students who are one or more years below grade level on standardized achievement tests. We asked operational schools to provide these estimates based on current enrollment. Nonoperational schools were asked to estimate percentages based on the students they expected to enroll in the future. Other items related to student characteristics of special interest given California's ethnolinguistic diversity, such as the percentage of students who were English learners.

Metropolitan charter schools served high concentrations of low achievers. Seven of the 9 schools that enrolled predominantly low achievers were in metropolitan areas. They comprised 54% of the metropolitan schools. In particular, 6 schools that enrolled at least 70% low achievers were located in metropolitan areas of at least 500,000 people (not shown in tables). By contrast, most of the schools with few low achievers were in small towns and rural areas (see Table 22). Low achievers made up under 20% of the enrollments of 6 of the 15 schools in these locations.

Metropolitan schools also served the highest concentrations of high achievers. Compared to charter schools in other areas, metropolitan schools served a fuller range of students. In addition to enrolling the highest concentrations of low-achieving students, they also enrolled the highest concentrations of high achievers. In nearly half of the charter schools in metropolitan areas, most of the students were above grade level (see Table 22). In 2 of them, over 70% were high achievers (not shown in tables).

None of the charters in small towns or rural areas reported comparable student achievement levels. That is, no school reported that 50% or more of its students were above grade level. However, only 5 of the 16 schools were below 20%.

New-start charters were more likely to target low achievers. Only five new-start schools were in a position to estimate the makeup of their student bodies, but in all five, at least 30% of the students were one or more years below grade-level national achievement norms. By comparison, less than half of the converted schools (43%) enrolled at least this amount (not shown in tables).

Table 22

Schools' Reports of the Percentage of Students One or More Years Below and Above National Achievement Norms

	School Location				Total	
	Metro		Small town/rural			
Percentage of students	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)
One-two years below the national norm						
0-19	2	15	6	40	8	28
20-49	5	31	7	46	12	41
50+	7	54	2	14	9	33
Total	14		15		29	
One-two years above the national norm						
0-19	5	38	5	32	10	34
20-49	2	16	11	68	13	45
50+	6	46	0	0	6	21
Total	13		16		29	

Metropolitan schools had exceptionally high concentrations of minority students and many English learners. All eight schools that reported at least 70% minority enrollment were in metropolitan areas. Only two metropolitan charters were under 50% minority. As significant, half the metropolitan schools had 70% or more minority enrollment (see Table 23). However, most of the schools located in small towns or rural areas (59%) had fewer than 20% minorities.

As a benchmark, slightly over half the state's five million students were classified as racial or ethnic minority in 1993-94 (CDE, 1994). Eight schools in the sample approximate this 50% ratio. The sample as a whole reflects a broad range of student composition. One quarter of the sample is over 70% minority and one third is under 20% minority.

English learners also were concentrated in the metropolitan charter schools. In 6 of them, 50% or more of the students were limited English proficient (LEP) (see Table 23). No metropolitan school had fewer than 10% LEP students and the typical school was 20% LEP, which approximates the statewide average of 22% of enrollment for the 1993-94 school year (CDE, 1993). In

contrast, small-town and rural charters had few LEP students: Fourteen of the 17 had under 20% LEP.

Table 23
Schools' Reports of Percentage of Minority and LEP Students

	School Location				Total	
	Metro		Small town/rural			
Percentage of students	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)
Racial/ethnic minority						
0-19	1	6	10	59	11	33
20-49	1	6	5	29	6	18
50-60	6	38	2	12	8	24
70+	8	50	0	0	8	24
Total	16		17		33	
LEP						
0-19	3	20	14	82	17	53
20-49	6	40	3	18	9	28
50-60	4	27	0	0	4	13
70+	2	13	0	0	2	6
Total	15		17		32	

Charter schools began to blur residential boundaries. Traditionally, residence dictates where children attend school. The market-driven, open-enrollment policies associated with charter schools promised to change that. To minimize the effects of residential segregation, and to make schools accessible to all students, California's charter law specifies that admission to a charter school cannot be based on students' residence (although an existing school converting to charter status may give preference to pupils in its former attendance area). In practice, this specification means that whether a converted school is available to students from other neighborhoods depends on the number of parents who choose to transfer their children to other schools.

In 1993, charter schools began to blur, but not entirely erase, residential boundaries. About one third drew at least some students from throughout their sponsoring districts (10 schools). And another third drew some of their students from neighboring districts (see Table 24).

Most schools served the economic spectrum, but a few had high concentrations of low-income students. When California's charter law was enacted, some observers were concerned that charter schools might be concentrated in upper-middle class communities (Hart, 1993; Education Beat, 1992). In fact, our data suggest the majority served students from a broad socioeconomic spectrum. Most schools did not reach large concentrations of economically disadvantaged children, although a few did.

Table 24
Schools' Reports of Admissions Practices

	Type of school		School location		Total
Admissions practices	Converted ($n = 25$)	New-start ($n = 8$)	Metro ($n = 17$)	Small town/rural ($n = 17$)	($n = 33$)
Enrolls students throughout sponsoring district	7	3	6	4	10
Accepts students from more than one district	7	3	4	6	10
Gives priority to students in a specific attendance area	10	2	6	6	12
Only accepts students from a specific attendance area	1	0	1	0	1
Interviews parents of prospective students	10	7	5	12	17
Interviews prospective students	11	6	5	12	17

Table 25 arrays schools' estimates of the proportion of their students who were economically advantaged (i.e., resided with families with managerial or professional occupations) and those who were economically disadvantaged (i.e., qualified for free or reduced-price school breakfast or lunch).

Six schools, including 4 in metropolitan areas, reported that a majority of their students came from professional or managerial families. The typical charter school in a metropolitan area had a slightly higher percentage of advantaged students than did the typical charter in a small town or rural area (30% vs. 20%) (not shown in table). At the other end of the economic spectrum, 10 schools, including 7 metropolitan charters, served exceptionally

high concentrations of low-income students (i.e., 50% or more enrolled students).

Table 25
Schools' Reports of Percentage of Economically Advantaged and Disadvantaged Students

	School location				Total	
	Metro		Small town/rural			
Percentage of students	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)
Advantaged						
0-19	6	38	5	31	11	34
20-49	6	38	9	56	15	47
50+	4	24	2	12	6	18
Total	16		16		32	
Disadvantaged						
0-19	0	0	4	25	4	13
20-49	8	53	9	56	17	55
50+	7	47	3	18	10	32
Total	15		16		31	

Three schools enrolled a high percentage of students who might be considered at risk academically. All three were in metropolitan areas, and all fit the following student enrollment profile—over 80% minority, over 60% English learners, over 70% students qualifying for subsidized school meals, and over 70% one or two grades below national achievement norms.

Summary. Most of the schools that enrolled students who were low achievers, racial-ethnic minorities, economically disadvantaged, and English learners were in metropolitan areas. In half of these schools, most students were at least one year below national norms on standardized achievement tests, were members of racial or ethnic minorities, and came from economically disadvantaged homes. In 40% of the schools, most students were English learners. This profile is a sharp contrast with small-town and rural schools. Relatively few schools in those areas were made up primarily of such students.

However, the picture would be incomplete without recognizing that the metropolitan charter schools also served a broader *range* of students than their counterparts in small towns and rural areas. Thus, schools with the highest concentrations of high achievers also were located in metropolitan areas, as were most of the schools with predominantly advantaged students.

Charter Schools' Impact

Small-scale reforms, such as charter schools, often are justified on the grounds that they can initiate changes that eventually ripple into disproportionately broader effects. Advocates, disillusioned with traditional concepts and practices, have expressed the hope that charter schools will create a ripple effect in any number of ways. For example, a few good schools might act as models for other schools. Or, the prospect of competition offered by charter schools could prod other schools to adopt new practices. Even the prospect of additional charter schools might cause recalcitrant districts to institute reforms.

We gathered information about three forms of leveraging: expansion of the charter concept within a district by stimulating additional petitioners; use of charter-schools' approaches by other public schools in the sponsoring district; and expanded visions of educational reform and restructuring in the sponsoring district because of the charter-school experience.

Districts expected few additional schools to seek charter status. Most districts did not anticipate receiving more charter petitions in the next two years. In fact, only seven districts (33%) said they expected to add more charter schools to their current number. Usually the districts expected just one additional petition over the next two years. The majority of California's current charter schools were the only charters in their districts. Apparently they will remain so. However, one large urban district reported that it expected to receive six additional petitions. If approved, the additional charters would bring the total number to eight. Another district, located in a metropolitan area, expected at least three or four schools to join the district's current charter schools (see Table 26).

Furthermore, only eight districts (38%) said they encouraged people to start charter schools (see Table 26). While district support may not be the only important factor, there is little to suggest that momentum is building within more than a few districts in our sample.

The degree to which schools encouraged additional charter schools depended on how schools thought new charters would

effect current ones. Those districts that reported encouraging charter petitioners also told us they believed charter schools could significantly improve education in their districts or could facilitate the implementation of reforms already underway (not shown in tables). Other districts were less optimistic. We can only wonder, then, whether there are other schools still patiently planning how to organize themselves as charter schools or whether the market for this program already is reaching the saturation point.

Table 26
Districts' Reports of Prospects for Additional Charter Schools

District activities and expectations	Type of district: Metropolitan ($n = 5$)	Type of district: Small town/rural ($n = 16$)
Encourages people to start charter schools	2	6
Expects one additional petition	1	3
Expects two additional petitions	1	0
Expects three or more additional petitions	2	0
Encourages other schools to adopt charter-school practices	1	8

Up to one third of the districts plan to disseminate practices being used by charter schools. When the *schools* were asked whether their districts were encouraging other schools in the district to adopt practices being used by charter schools, 27% answered in the affirmative (see Table 15). When the same question was put to the sponsoring *districts*, 9 districts said they already were disseminating charter schools' practices to others in their districts (see Table 26). However, based on the schools' responses, it appears that metropolitan districts were less inclined to diffuse charter schools' practices. Districts in small towns and rural areas were much more likely than metropolitan districts to encourage other schools to adopt the practices of charters in the district.

In one out of four districts, policies related to restructuring were being liberalized. If the presence of a charter school were

to prod a district into liberalizing policies governing school restructuring, we could say the charter school had promoted change in the district. This effect was not yet widespread in 1993, but according to the schools, it did occur. Only 8 schools (24%) reported the district liberalized its policies due to the presence of charter schools (see Table 15). Thirty-one percent of the schools in metropolitan districts (5 schools), compared to 20% of those in small towns and rural areas (3 schools), reported policies had been liberalized.

Summary. The impact of charter schools on their districts was assessed in three ways. First, with the exception of two districts, there was little evidence that the presence of a charter school within a district is stimulating other petitioners to come forward with charter proposals, or that districts are encouraging them to do so. Second, most districts were not inclined to disseminate practices being used by charter schools. However, depending on whether schools or districts were giving the answer, between one fourth and nearly one half of the districts said they were disseminating their practices. Also, more dissemination was going on in small towns and rural areas than in metropolitan districts. Finally, one out of four districts was liberalizing its policies governing restructuring as a direct result of the presence of charter schools in the district.

WHY NOT MORE CHARTER SCHOOLS?

Some had predicted that so many petitioners would apply for charter-school status in 1993 that the legislatively imposed cap of 100 schools would need to be raised before the end of the year. Arguably, the cap seems low in a state with more than 7,500 elementary and secondary schools, and an unknown, but presumably large, number of people who wish to take advantage of the opportunity to create new, innovative schools.

However, the cap had not been reached as late as May 1994. Furthermore, schools joined the charter ranks slowly. By the end of March 1993, three months after the charter law became effective, 10 schools had received charter numbers from the state board. By the end of September, there were 39 charter schools. A few more received their charter numbers in late fall and winter, bringing the total number of schools to 44 by Dec. 31, 1993. By May of the second year, the number had reached 50, half the authorized ceiling.

In his remarks at a November 1993 gathering of the state's charter schools, Senator Hart posed a question that has since been raised by California's governor and other political leaders—why

so few schools? We do not have a simple answer, but offer some possible reasons.

The Burden of Starting a School May Discourage Would-Be Petitioners

The charter schools and sponsoring districts we surveyed had a clear appreciation of the fact that charter schools opened (or reopened) complex issues related to accountability, liability, compliance, and/or equity. Four fifths of the charter schools (24 schools) and three quarters of their sponsoring districts (16 districts) indicated this to be the case.

The real burdens were reflected in more work for teachers and higher accountability for student outcomes. Three quarters of the schools (24) reported that charters meant more work for teachers and other school staff. All new-start schools reported that "going" charter meant extra work for teachers.

Accountability Provisions May Discourage Some

Some petitioners may shy away from charter schools' accountability for outcomes. Many of the schools in the sample, especially the converted schools, believed they were going to be held to higher accountability standards than other schools in their districts. Nearly three quarters of the converted schools expressed this belief. Overall, more than half the schools indicated they would be held to this higher standard.

Technical Assistance Is Not Available to Petitioners

Unlike charter schools in a number of states (e.g., Minnesota, Colorado, Georgia, Missouri), California's schools do not receive technical assistance from state departments of education. Therefore, groups seeking a charter must have the financial resources, as well as the technical expertise, needed to develop a petition, and, once it is approved, make its provisions operational.

There Is No Start-Up Money for Charter Schools

The lack of funding to support charter-schools' planning, start up, and operations may be a disincentive, especially for petitioners wishing to create new schools.

Lack of funding was especially harmful to the new schools in the respondent sample. All eight reported that securing planning and start-up funds was the greatest obstacle they faced. In one case, the funding obstacle was insurmountable. After a year of struggling to secure funding, this school finally abandoned its attempts to found a new school and relinquished its charter-school designation.

In addition, unresolved funding issues may discourage potential applicants. As others have observed, charter schools must address two basic funding issues: (a) determining their

funding entitlements; and (b) calculating and negotiating the sponsoring district's share of the school's entitlement.

It is technically and politically difficult to effectively address both funding issues. First, California law provides little guidance. It contains broad language related to its intent to fund charter schools. It considers each charter school to be a school district for the purposes of the state school funding guarantee and to free them from the requirements associated with special-purpose program funding. Second, California's school finance system is so complex that prospective schools and their sponsoring district may lack the resources to understand it and reconcile it with the charter-law's intent (Premack & Diamond, 1994).

Suspending State Codes May Not Provide the Autonomy Needed

Suspending state codes does not entirely circumvent restrictions traditionally imposed by local school districts and employee contracts. Although our findings show that most schools felt less constrained, many still felt pinched by local rules. While the majority of schools were not complaining, school district regulations and union contracts were still sources of problems for substantial numbers. Nearly two in five continued to regard school district regulations as one of their greatest obstacles, and for one in three, union contracts presented a major obstacle as well.

Law's Ambiguity Concerning Autonomy May Deter Petitioners

Nearly all schools in the study looked to charter status to free themselves of specific rules and regulations, and to some extent they succeeded. The legislation excuses charter schools from most state laws and codes governing education. However, the legislation does not guarantee that schools will be independent of their districts. Each charter school must negotiate the parameters of its autonomy with its sponsoring district. Consequently, whether charter schools, in fact, possess the degree of autonomy implied in the model is questionable. This ambiguity may be a deterrent to groups concerned about the risk-benefit ratio of seeking charter status.

Board Control May Deter Petitioners

School boards are free to impose their own conditions and special regulations on charter schools. The prospect of such conditions may discourage potential petitioners.

Lukewarm Teachers' Union Support for Charter Schools May Be a Deterrent

California's charter law was not supported by the state's powerful teachers' unions, especially the California Teachers Association (CTA). Since the charter-school law's passage, CTA has adopted a more positive stance. Still its initial opposition and subsequent lukewarm reception undoubtedly affected the number of schools chartered in 1993. Most local teachers' unions were, at best, ambivalent about charter schools.

School Districts Are Not Aggressively Promoting Charter Schools

School districts, themselves, were not totally supportive in 1993. True, most superintendents and school boards were at least mildly supportive of charters in their districts, and in a number of instances the superintendent provided leadership. The schools reported that half the districts tried to facilitate district paperwork and communicate well with the schools. However, with respect to other important elements, such as facilitating what the schools wanted to do and giving them recognition, the majority of all districts fell short. Only eight encouraged charter petitions, and, in a half dozen cases, superintendents or boards either opposed a petition or were cool toward it.

Local Reforms May Head Off Petitions

The experience of Minnesota's charter schools suggests that some districts preempted charter petitions by instituting education reforms (Stanfield, 1992). Such reform could be happening in California.

Alternatives Are Available for Schools and Parents

Most of the schools that were chartered in 1993 converted from existing schools. For such schools, there are options besides charter status. For example, in 1991, California enacted a School Restructuring Demonstration program under Senate Bill 1274. This program provides competitive grants to enable schools to plan and implement comprehensive restructuring efforts. Some reform-minded schools selected this option. In fact, four of the 1993 charter schools had previously received SB 1274 planning and/or restructuring grants on which they built their charter programs.

Parents can withdraw their children from their resident schools and shop for another school within the district because of a recently passed open enrollment law. Parents may not select a school if it does not have space, or if its racial balance would be upset by admitting their child. Yet, this state law gave an alternative to some parents who might otherwise have petitioned for a charter school.

The Pool of Potential Petitioners May Be Small

Finally, there simply may not be a large group of potential petitioners interested in undertaking the arduous job of planning and operating charter schools.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the passage of the first charter-school law in Minnesota in 1991, interest in charter schools has grown dramatically. To date, 10 states have enacted legislation authorizing some version of such schools, and many others are considering charter-school laws. At the national level, charters are included in the Clinton Administration's education agenda.

In California, even though a huge demand has not yet materialized, with 50 charter schools up and running, the state is at the forefront of this movement. Given the relatively generous 100-cap limit on the number of schools that can be chartered, and the unique provisions of California's charter law, these schools promise to attract the attention of education reformers and charter-school advocates. Therefore, it is important to track the life cycle of the state's charter schools to document their evolution, the innovations they adopt, and their impact on public education.

California's Charter Law

California's charter law differs from most other states in three key respects:

1. California has established a locally administered system that approves and monitors charter schools. This means state education agencies, which still play major roles in quality control and oversight in other education programs, have limited roles.

2. At the same time, California's charter law does not establish charter schools' legal autonomy from their local sponsors. This means that each school must decide if it wishes to be autonomous, define what that means in concrete terms, and negotiate with its local sponsor. How schools define their status, initially and over time, is an important dimension of California's charter-school movement.

3. The law provides schools with the opportunity to control employee-related issues that have traditionally been the province of local unions, but against the backdrop of the state employee unions' opposition to the law.

School and Sponsor Surveys

We mailed surveys to California's first-year charter schools, and their sponsors, in late fall 1993. At that time, 44 schools had received charter numbers from the state. They were sponsored by 27 local agencies. Completed surveys were returned by 34 charter schools (77%) and 21 charter sponsors (78%).

1. Half the schools were located in metropolitan communities/ districts. Outside large urban areas, most operated as the only charter school in their district.

2. Three quarters were existing schools that converted to charter status.

3. Most were elementary schools, spread across the state.

Although underrepresented compared to the number of students who live in metropolitan areas, it is nonetheless significant that metropolitan schools were participating in the program. They had to overcome more obstacles than schools located in small towns and rural areas.

Summary

The survey findings provide a general impression of California's fledgling charter-school movement and suggest patterns worth following. Some trends may come to characterize charter schools in California; others may change as additional schools are chartered; and still others may be first-year phenomena that dissipate as the state's charter-school movement evolves. Some of the findings that we believe warrant careful monitoring are summarized below.

Districts resisted charter schools that sought independence. Charter schools are envisioned as innovative, autonomous public schools. They are freed from hamstringing rules and regulations imposed by the state, and ideally, from the confines of local school district rules and local employee contracts. In return for autonomy, the schools are accountable for operating under the terms of their approved charters and for delivering the outcomes specified in those charters.

California's charter law leaves the question of charter schools' autonomy from local districts up to the schools to negotiate with their sponsors. In 1993, only a limited number of schools was autonomous. Autonomy still was being explored and negotiated by others. In still others, it may never occur.

For the approximately one in three schools seeking independence from their school districts, it was an uphill battle. In general, the more autonomy and control a school sought, the less support it could count on from the sponsoring district.

1. Compared to the schools not interested in independence, those for whom it was important reported their charter petition was less frequently supported by: (a) the superintendent (55% vs. 92%); (b) the school board (36% vs. 85%); and (c) staff in the district's central office (27% vs. 77%).

2. Local teachers' unions were less likely to support charter schools that sought to control staff hiring, and transfer and reassignment. None of these charter schools received the support of the local teachers' unions for their charter petition.

3. Schools that wanted to manage the school fiscally also encountered a lukewarm or hostile reception from the bureaucrats who had customarily been in charge compared to other charter schools (10% vs. 42%).

4. Schools for whom independence from the district was very important were less likely to have cooperative relationships with their local school board (64% vs. 85%) and with the district administration (55% vs. 62%) than those for whom it was not important.

Metropolitan schools faced difficult obstacles. The survey findings revealed a schism between charter schools in metropolitan areas and those located in small towns and rural areas. Metropolitan schools were confronted with an array of obstacles that were not nearly as prevalent in small towns and rural communities. They ranged from lack of support from key players in the district to union resistance and obstructive local rules.

Even so, schools in metropolitan districts were more determined to seek independence from their host districts. For the most part, they did have more control over school operations than did charter schools in small towns and rural districts. But this control, and the desire among half of them to become independent of their sponsoring districts, caused friction.

1. Charter schools in metropolitan districts were more determined to seek independence from their host districts than other charters. Eight of the 11 schools for whom independence was important were located in metropolitan areas.

2. Local board support was especially low in metropolitan areas. Less than half the metropolitan charter schools (47%) reported local board support for their charter petition. In contrast, nearly all the schools located in small towns and rural areas (87%) reported local board support.

3. Compared to charter schools in small towns and rural areas, petitions for charter schools in metropolitan areas were less frequently supported by the superintendent (65% vs. 82%) and the district's central office (36% vs. 63%).

4. Teachers' unions in metropolitan areas were far less supportive of charter petitions than unions elsewhere. About one quarter of the schools in metropolitan areas said their petitions were supported by local unions compared to nearly two thirds of the schools in small towns and rural areas. Even more striking, 40% of the schools in metropolitan areas reported union opposition to their charter petition compared to half that percentage in small towns and rural areas.

5. Nearly two thirds of the metropolitan charter schools reported their sponsoring districts had added or intended to add more conditions before granting charters. Four of the five metropolitan districts concurred.

6. Once they received charter status, schools in metropolitan areas had considerably less district support than other charters. Compared to the charters located in small towns and rural districts, charters in metropolitan areas reported their districts were less likely: (a) to provide visibility and recognition for their schools (29% vs. 40%); (b) promote the schools' programs (24% vs. 53%); (c) maintain good communication with the schools (41% vs. 73%); or (d) encourage others to adopt the charter schools' practices (18% vs. 40%).

7. Local unions were particularly lukewarm toward charters in metropolitan areas. Only 41% of the charter schools

characterized their working relationships with the local teachers' union as cooperative, whereas 63% of the other schools had cooperative relationships. Four schools in metropolitan areas considered the relationship to be adversarial; only one school outside the metropolitan area reported an adversarial relationship with a union.

8. District rules were far more likely to be problematic for metropolitan schools than for schools in small towns and rural areas. Two thirds of the metropolitan schools reported that district regulations were a great obstacle to their plans and/or operations compared to only 13% of the other schools.

Most schools were associated with teachers' unions, but relationships were strained. California's law leaves the decision regarding collective bargaining up to the schools as specified in their charters. A charter school may choose not to bargain, it may become its own bargaining unit, or it may follow the terms of locally negotiated employee contracts. However, few schools chose to exercise the opportunity to sever traditional union ties.

1. Two thirds had collective bargaining agreements, in many cases with the possibility of waivers. As might be expected, 80% of the converted schools reported their teachers were represented by the local teachers' union. In contrast, half the new-start schools had not yet decided whether their teachers would be represented by the local teachers' union.

2. At least two thirds of the schools claimed jurisdiction over selecting staff, developing job descriptions, and reassigning or transferring teachers.

3. Most of the schools said they used or plan to use noncertificated parents and community members as classroom instructors.

4. Only one out of two schools said their working relationship with the local teachers' union was cooperative. Another one third characterized it as neutral or mixed. Five schools, including four in metropolitan areas, regarded the relationship as adversarial.

Parents were active in many charter schools. According to the charter schools, parents' leadership was especially visible in

new-start schools, where, in most cases, parents had been actively involved in developing charter petitions. Converted schools also built on a strong foundation of parental support. That is, in most cases, parents frequently had volunteered at these schools before they became charter schools. But rather than relying on voluntarism, most schools required parents' participation in school activities, and most required parents to sign formal contracts that stipulated how they would support their children's learning. Parents' roles also extended beyond governance into the classroom where parents and community members were used as instructors.

1. Three quarters of the charter schools reported they either used parents as instructors in 1993, or they planned to do so in the future. This was especially true of charter schools located in small towns and communities. Fourteen of these schools, nearly 90%, cast parents or community members in instructor roles. These schools included 5 that operated home-study programs in which parents who assumed teaching duties were supported by a cadre of certified teachers at the school.

2. Over half the schools (56%) required parents either to participate in specific school activities or to volunteer at school for a specified number of hours. This requirement was common among schools in small towns and rural areas (59% had such a requirement) as well as in metropolitan charters (required by 53%).

3. The majority of schools required parents to sign contracts that specified exactly how they would support their child's academic success at the charter school. Contracts were especially common in small towns and rural areas, where they were used by three of every four schools (compared to about half the schools in metropolitan districts).

At-risk students were served by metropolitan schools. California's charter law encourages local school boards to give preference to petitioners intending to serve academically low-achieving students. In practical terms, this guideline would only come into play as a selection factor when there are more petitions than available slots in a district, which did not occur in 1993. In fact, many charter schools did not target their services to low-

achieving students or other categories of students who were at risk academically.

Low achievers were served almost exclusively by schools located in metropolitan areas. This also was true of minority students, English learners, and students from economically disadvantaged homes.

1. Seven of the nine schools in which 50% or more of the students were one or more years below the national norm on standardized tests were in metropolitan areas. In six of them, over 70% of the students were below the norm. In contrast, in most of the small-town and rural schools, low achievers comprised less than 30% of the enrollments; they constituted fewer than one in five students in 40% of these schools.

2. All the schools that reported more than 60% minority enrollments were in metropolitan areas. Only one metropolitan charter was under 40% minority. As significant, half had 70% or more minority enrollment. In contrast, more than half the schools located in small towns and rural areas had 10% or fewer minority students. Only two were majority minority.

3. English learners also were concentrated in the metropolitan charter schools. In nine, at least 40% of the students were LEP. No school had fewer than 10%. In contrast, English learners comprised less than 10% of the students in most small-town/rural charter schools.

4. Seven schools served exceptionally high concentrations of low-income students (i.e., 70% or more of enrolled students).

5. In three schools, enrollments consisted predominantly of students who might be considered at risk academically. All three were in metropolitan areas, and all fit the following student enrollment profile: over 80% minority, over 60% English learners, over 70% students qualifying for subsidized school meals, and over 70% one or two grades below national achievement norms.

Charter schools had limited, but perceptible impact. Reforms, such as charter schools, often are justified on the grounds that a few schools in a district can initiate changes that eventually ripple into disproportionately broader effects. We

gathered information from the schools and their host school districts on three forms of leveraging: expansion of the charter concept within a district by stimulating additional petitioners; use of charter-schools' approaches by other public schools in the sponsoring district; and expanded visions of educational reform and restructuring in the sponsoring district because of the charter-school experience. Even in the first year, the schools had some limited impact.

1. A quarter of the schools reported their sponsoring districts had liberalized their policies related to school restructuring due to the presence of charter schools.

2. One in four schools also reported their sponsoring districts encouraged other schools to adopt the practices being used by charter schools. Compared to metropolitan districts, small-town and rural districts were twice as likely to provide such encouragement. District respondents were more positive. Nearly half said districts already were diffusing charter schools' practices.

3. One third of the districts said they anticipated receiving more charter-school petitions over the next two years.

4. Many schools and districts were confused about the state's role. Half the schools were concerned that the state might not give them the freedom needed for their programs to succeed, even though state regulation had been removed and the state's oversight for charter schools is minimal. Similarly, about half the districts reported they were waiting for guidance from the state about what charter schools could or could not do.

Schools challenged the notion of no-cost reform. Charter schools offer the prospect of educational reform without cost to taxpayers, an outlook that is politically attractive in fiscal hard times. In reality, the costs of "going" charter were borne by those involved in the schools' planning and operations.

1. Over half the schools we surveyed, including 80% of the schools in metropolitan areas, said that charter status meant more work for teachers.

2. Forty-four percent of the schools, including most new starts, found that lack of funding was a major obstacle in creating a charter school. In fact, one new-start school relinquished its charter designation early in 1994, after struggling unsuccessfully to secure start-up funding.

3. Two thirds of the metropolitan charter schools and one third of the converted schools said lack of sufficient funding was a major obstacle to school planning and/or operations.

Why Not More Charter Schools?

By May 1994, only half of the authorized 100 schools were being planned or operated. Some possible reasons why there were not more charter schools follow:

1. Starting a new school creates a burden on petitioners. Petitioners are not provided with technical assistance. There is no money to pay for the start-up costs.

2. Petitioners will be held accountable for outcomes and may be held to higher standards than other schools in their respective districts.

3. Suspending state codes does not necessarily provide schools with regulatory relief from rules imposed by local districts.

4. The law does not actually define the relationship between a charter school and its district, nor guarantee it autonomy; everything is negotiable.

5. School districts are free to impose special requirements as conditions for obtaining a charter.

6. At best, most local teacher associations have been ambivalent about charter schools, and some locals have actively opposed them.

7. School districts are not aggressively promoting charter schools, and moreover, the extent of support within a district is inversely related to the degree of autonomy the charter is seeking.

8. A number of local reforms and statewide alternatives that are available may dilute enthusiasm and the perceived need for charter schools.

9. The pool of potential petitioners may be far smaller than anticipated.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, we recommend the following:

1. *Provide financial support to charter schools from public agencies and private organizations.* Charter schools need financial backing. Much of the costs are being borne by those who are involved in planning and operating charter schools.

2. *Set aside funds to provide technical support to charter schools seeking assistance.* Aside from needing money to pay start-up costs, we believe many schools need technical assistance. The process of implementing innovations is plagued with pitfalls and hazards that can be avoided if schools are able to access outside assistance.

3. *Clarify charter schools' legal status.* One of the arguments driving the charter-school movement is that schools can improve and innovate if they are freed from constraining state rules and regulations. Ideally, this freedom extends to legal autonomy, and fiscal and operational independence. However, the charter schools reported that local support was much less likely to be forthcoming for petitioners seeking independence from their districts. These petitioners were concentrated in metropolitan areas. The desire among half of them to become independent of their sponsoring districts caused friction with their local sponsors both as they developed their petitions and once the schools were operational.

4. *Support studies of innovative practices in charter schools.* In this report, we did not attempt to estimate how much innovation actually took place among California's charter schools in 1993, but the issue is so fundamental to the charter-school movement that it warrants careful, long-term study.

NOTES

1. Following are the 13 provisions that schools must address in their charters. Each charter petition must describe: (a) the school's educational program (i.e., who the school is educating, what it means to be an educated person in the 21st century, how learning best occurs); (b) measurable pupil outcomes (i.e., skills, knowledge, attitudes specified as goals); (c) the method(s) by which pupil progress in meeting pupil outcomes will be measured; (d) the school's governance structure, including, but not limited to, how the school will ensure parental involvement; (e) employment qualifications to be met by school employees; (f) the procedures the school will follow to ensure the health and safety of pupils and staff; (g) the means by which the school will achieve racial and ethnic balance among pupils (representative of the surrounding general population); (h) admissions requirements, if applicable; (i) the manner in which annual financial and programmatic audits will be conducted; (j) the procedures by which pupils can be suspended or expelled; (k) the manner in which staff will be covered by the State Teachers' Retirement System, the Public Employees' Retirement System, or social security; (l) the public school alternatives for pupils not choosing to attend a charter school; and (m) a description of the rights of any district employee to work in a charter school and, subsequently, to return to the district.

2. When local school boards rejected a charter school petition in 1993, county offices upheld the boards' decisions, presumably to avoid confrontation and the extra work involved in running a school with existing staff. Given the strong practical and political disincentives for county officers, this provision has not provided much recourse for charter schools in 1993 and may not in the future.

3. SWRL also is referred to as "we" or "our" in this report.

4. Ten school-level and seven district-level respondents did not return completed surveys. The nonresponding districts included 3 in metropolitan areas, 2 in small towns, and 2 in rural areas. One of the nonresponding schools was located in a metropolitan area, 6 in small towns, and 3 in rural areas.

5. The first school was a small alternative school serving students in kindergarten through grade three. Structured as a cooperative operated by parents and school staff, the school's

genesis began before the charter legislation passed and developers were able to organize quickly. The second was a middle school serving students in grades six and seven. The school was organized by parents and staff members from one of the district's elementary schools who had wanted to fashion an alternative middle school experience for their primarily Latino students for some time. The charter legislation provided them with the opportunity to create a small school of approximately 120 students that addresses the needs of students who are English learners.

6. Remarks at the National Seminar of the Education Writers Association, April 14-17, 1994, Seattle.

7. We decided not to publish tests of statistical significance in this phase of our research, because this is a preliminary report, the purpose of which is to identify a pool of trends and issues that may be worth following more closely and with greater precision. We were primarily interested in the *patterns* of differences among related sets of variables, rather than determining the significance of each variable, one at a time. Also, statistical exactness seemed premature in that the schools were in their first year, still rapidly evolving, and increasing in number. Finally, our original plan was to conduct a census of the 44 charter schools in existence at the time of the study. The fact that the 34 responding schools were not randomly selected violates the assumptions of many standard statistical tests.

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APPENDIX

CHARTER-SCHOOL DISTRICT SURVEY

School District: _____

Your Name: _____ **Position:** _____

I. General Information

1. Please circle the response that best describes how familiar you are with:

	Know Very Little					Very Well Informed
a. California's charter-school legislation	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. The charter school(s) in your district	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Other charter schools in California	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. Prospects and problems associated with charter schools	1	2	3	4	5	6

2. In your district, does the school board **or** district administration perform any of the functions listed below? **(Circle yes or no for each item.)**

	YES	NO
a. Appoint members of each charter school's governing body	1	2
b. Require evidence that each charter school is meeting performance standards	1	2
c. Approve the governing body chosen by the charter school(s)	1	2
d. Require the school(s) to periodically update their charter(s)	1	2
e. Approve an annual budget submitted by each charter school	1	2
f. Sign-off on all contracts made by the charter school(s)	1	2
g. Approve any revisions or changes to a school's charter	1	2
h. Determine how many students attend the charter school(s)	1	2
i. Approve any waivers requested by the charter school(s)	1	2

3. One or more charter schools are operating or being planned in your district. What is its (their) relationship with:

	Adversarial			Mixed or Neutral		Cooperative
a. Your district's administration?	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. The local teachers' union?	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. The local school board?	1	2	3	4	5	6

4. How many additional charter school petitions does your district expect to receive . . . .

   a. During the 1993-94 school year? _____

   b. In 1994-95? _____

II. Your District and Charter Schools

5. To what extent to you agree or disagree with the statements below? **(Circle one numeral for each statement.)**

		Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree
a.	Our district encourages people to start charter schools	1	2	3	4	5	6
b.	In deciding whether to grant a charter, our district weighs probable outcomes against administrative burdens on district staff.	1	2	3	4	5	6
c.	Our district has added (or will add) more conditions before it approves a charter-school petition	1	2	3	4	5	6
d.	Someone in the district helps the charter school(s) cut through red tape	1	2	3	4	5	6
e.	In deciding to grant a charter, our district weighs probable outcomes against legal risks	1	2	3	4	5	6
f.	There is a real risk that charter schools will abuse their freedom	1	2	3	4	5	6
g.	Partially in response to the charter-school legislation, our district has liberalized policies pertaining to school restructuring	1	2	3	4	5	6
h.	Our district provides visibility and recognition for its charter school(s)	1	2	3	4	5	6
i.	Our school board has lost authority, but is still responsible for what happens at charter schools	1	2	3	4	5	6
j.	Our charter school(s) impose(s) enormous administrative burdens on us	1	2	3	4	5	6
k.	Our district risks losing ADA if a charter school becomes too large	1	2	3	4	5	6
l.	The leadership in our district is committed to facilitating what each charter school is proposing to do (or is doing)	1	2	3	4	5	6
m.	Our district maintains good communication with its charter school(s)	1	2	3	4	5	6
n.	Our district encourages other schools to adopt practices used in its charter school(s)	1	2	3	4	5	6
o.	What our district permits a charter school to do depends largely on the opinions of auditors and/or lawyers	1	2	3	4	5	6
p.	Our charter school(s) drain(s) ADA needed for critical programs	1	2	3	4	5	6
q.	Partially in response to the charter school legislation, schools in our district have begun to experiment with new programs and practices	1	2	3	4	5	6
r.	Our district is liable for the actions of its charter schools without benefit of the usual safeguards	1	2	3	4	5	6
s.	Our district has not received clear guidance from the state about what charter schools can and cannot do	1	2	3	4	5	6
t.	Its charter school(s) put(s) our district at risk of being out of compliance with court rulings	1	2	3	4	5	6

6. Which statement below most closely characterizes your opinion of charter schools in your district? **(Circle only one.)**

Charter schools . . .

a.	Could significantly improve the education of children	1
b.	Might achieve useful but limited reforms	2
c.	Are not necessary to implement the reforms and changes that are really needed	3
d.	Could make it easier to implement change/reform already underway	4
e.	Are more trouble than they are worth	5
f.	Open the door to serious problems that could ultimately hurt public education	6
g.	Could have public relations advantages, but not much more	7
h.	Are likely to do things our district does not approve	8
i.	Act as a "safety valve" by offering parents another educational option	9

7. How many people reside in the city or town in which the district is located? **(Circle one.)**

a.	Over 1,000,000	1
b.	500,000 - 999,999	2
c.	100,000 - 499,999	3
d.	50,000 - 99,999	4
e.	10,000 - 49,999	5
f.	5,000 - 9, 999	6
g.	4,999 or less	7

III. Rules and Waivers

8. Public education is regulated with rules generated by the state, school districts, and teacher and other unions. What is your assessment of the necessity of such rules? **(Circle one numeral for each item.)**

		Most Are Necessary	Some Are Necessary	Many Are not Necessary	Most Should be Rescinded
a.	State rules	1	2	3	4
b.	School district rules	1	2	3	4
c.	Union rules	1	2	3	4
d.	Federal rules	1	2	3	4
e.	Rules from court rulings	1	2	3	4

9. Which statement most accurately describes your opinion of the waiver process? **(Circle only one.)**

a.	It is useful and effective	1
b.	It works, but it is time consuming and cumbersome	2
c.	It is inefficient and not effective	3
d.	It can actually make matters worse	4

IV. Issues Raised by Charter Schools

10. Listed below are issues charter schools have raised. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each statement? **(Circle one numeral for each statement.)**

		Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree
a.	Some rules are still interfering with charter school planning or operations	1	2	3	4	5	6
b.	The school attracts (or will attract) the best students from other schools	1	2	3	4	5	6
c.	New rules and authority structures are as constraining as old ones	1	2	3	4	5	6
d.	Managing nonacademic services diverts energy from academics	1	2	3	4	5	6
e.	The school must meet higher accountability standards than other schools	1	2	3	4	5	6
f.	Some in the community feel the program could be done without a charter	1	2	3	4	5	6
g.	A charter means more work for teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6
h.	Teachers' authority in charter schools is being eroded by parents' increased influence	1	2	3	4	5	6
i.	The school receives (or will receive) less ADA funds than hoped	1	2	3	4	5	6
j.	Restrictive state rules are a great obstacle for charter schools	1	2	3	4	5	6
k.	The local teachers' union encourages teachers to work in charter schools	1	2	3	4	5	6
l.	One of the great obstacles to charter schools is district regulations	1	2	3	4	5	6
m.	Charter schools have opened (or reopened) complex issues related to accountability, liability, compliance, and/or equity	1	2	3	4	5	6
n.	A restrictive local union contract is a great obstacle to charter schools	1	2	3	4	5	6.
o.	The state may not give charter schools the freedom needed for their programs to work	1	2	3	4	5	6
p.	The relationship between the bodies that govern charter schools and school boards is unclear	1	2	3	4	5	6
q.	Charter schools are not really going to avoid rules and regulations	1	2	3	4	5	6
r.	If a charter school raises private funds to support educational programs, it risks being sued for providing special treatment to some students that is not available to others	1	2	3	4	5	6
s.	Securing funding to start or run a charter school is a major obstacle	1	2	3	4	5	6

Thank you for completing and returning this questionnaire to SWRL, 4665 Lampson Avenue, Los Alamitos, CA 90720; 310/598-7661.

CHARTER-SCHOOL SURVEY

Charter School: _____

Your Name: _____ **Position:** _____

I. School and Student Information

1. When did (or will) students begin classes at the charter school? _____ month _____ year

2. Approximately how many students are (or will be) enrolled in the charter school. . .

   a. In the first year ? _____

   b. After three years? _____

3. What is (or will be) the lowest grade included in the first year? The highest grade? **(Circle two.)**

   a. Pre-K K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

   b. **If the school is ungraded,** what is the students' age range? _____

   c. In the future, will the school expand to include additional grade levels? YES NO

4. In what type of community is the charter school located? **(Circle one.)**

   a. Inner city 1
   b. Residential neighborhood within a city 2
   c. Suburb of larger city 3
   d. Small town that is not a suburb 4
   e. Rural area 5

5. Which of the following admission criteria does (or will) the charter school use? **(Check all that apply.)**

   a. An interview with the student _____
   b. An interview with a student's parent(s) _____
   c. A contract with parent(s) _____
   d. Admission test(s) tailored for the school _____
   e. Satisfactory standardized achievement test scores _____
   f. Performing at grade level or above _____
   g. Ability to succeed in an accelerated program _____
   h. A specific area of interest related to the school's program _____
   i. No record of being in trouble with the law _____
   j. No prior suspensions or expulsions _____

6. Which phrase best describes the students who are (or will be) enrolled in the school? **(Circle one.)**

   a. Diversified enrollment; no target or special student population 1
   b. Targeted to one or more at-risk student populations 2
   c. Targeted to gifted or college-bound students 3

7. What is (or will be) the school's enrollment policy? **(Circle one.)**

   a. Accept only students within a specific attendance area (neighborhood) 1
   b. Give priority to students in a specific attendance area 2
   c. Enroll students throughout the district 3
   d. Accept students from more than one district 4

8. Please estimate the percentage of students in each category who attend (or will attend) the charter school. **(Circle a percentage for each category.)**

a. Members of racial/ethnic minorities	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80+
b. Limited English proficient	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80+
c. Qualify for free/reduced-price breakfast or lunch	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80+
d. Qualify for special education placement	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80+
e. One or more years above national norm on standardized tests	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80+
f. One or more years below national norm on standardized tests	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80+
g. Were retained in grade at least once	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80+
h. Currently or formerly school dropouts	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80+
i. Reside with families that have professional or managerial occupations	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80+

II. Evolution of the Charter Petition

9. Which individuals or groups were **primarily** responsible for initiating the charter-school idea? (Please specify their position [e.g., PTA president, school principal, business executive])

_____

_____

10. What is the **major** reason you petitioned to become a charter school?

_____

_____

11. How important were the following reasons for seeking charter status? **(Circle one numeral for each reason.)**

	Not Important					Very Important
a. Become independent of the district	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Create a totally new entity	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Accelerate changes already underway	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. Change the school's authority structure	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Gain control of school staffing and personnel	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. Encourage people to begin thinking about change	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. Implement very specific changes	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. Form new relationships with others in the community	1	2	3	4	5	6
i. Gain control over curriculum and instruction	1	2	3	4	5	6
j. Establish our own student discipline code	1	2	3	4	5	6
k. Free ourselves from specific rule(s) or restrictions	1	2	3	4	5	6
l. Generally avoid rules, constraints (not specific ones)	1	2	3	4	5	6
m. Manage the school fiscally	1	2	3	4	5	6
n. Reduce the number of certified teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6
o. Run the school more economically	1	2	3	4	5	6
p. Other (specify): _____	1	2	3	4	5	6

_____

12. What was the position of each individual or group below toward your charter-school petition?

Individuals and Groups	(1) Opposed	(2) Reserved; Questioning	(3) Neutral	(4) Mixed Opinion	(5) Supportive	(6) Exercising Leadership	(7) Don't Know
a. Local teachers' union	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. State teachers' union	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. County office of education	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. District superintendent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e. Other central-office staff	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f. Local school board	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
g. State department of education	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
h. Parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

13. What is the charter school's current relationship with:

	Adversarial			Mixed or Neutral		Cooperative
a. School district administration?	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. The local teachers' union?	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. The local school board?	1	2	3	4	5	6

III. Charter-School Operations

14. Who exercises (or probably will exercise) final control over the areas listed below? (1) The charter school? (2) The school district? **(Circle 1 or 2 for each item.)**

	Charter School	School District
Curriculum and Instruction		
a. The courses students take	1	2
b. Staff development	1	2
c. Instructional approaches/strategies	1	2
d. Grading policy	1	2
e. Methods for assessing student progress	1	2
Student Conduct		
a. Rules regulating suspension and expulsion	1	2
b. Student discipline/behavior code	1	2
Staffing		
a. Selecting the staff	1	2
b. Selecting the principal	1	2
c. Developing job descriptions for staff	1	2
d. Reassigning or transferring teachers	1	2
Fiscal		
a. School budget	1	2
b. Expenditure of categorical funds	1	2
c. Other expenditures and purchases	1	2
Services		
a. Custodial/maintenance	1	2
b. Liability insurance	1	2
c. Personnel services not otherwise listed	1	2

15. Which statement best describes the local union's representation of teachers in the charter school? **(Circle one.)**

a. Covered by the bargaining agreement	1
b. Covered, with the possibility of waivers	2
c. Not covered by the local teachers' bargaining agreement	3
d. Not covered, but teachers retain tenure and reemployment rights	4
e. Not yet decided; subject to further negotiation	5

16. How important is each of the following issues for staff who are (or will be) at the charter school?

	Not Important					Very Important
a. Tenure	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Compensation	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Job assignment	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. Reemployment rights within the district	1	2	3	4	5	6

17. Which of the practices listed below apply to the charter school as it now operates (or will operate)? **(Check all that apply.)**

Teachers and Other Personnel

a. Teachers are evaluating one another (i.e., peer evaluation) _____
b. Teachers have more planning time than is typical in the district _____
c. Teachers receive differential pay based on specialization _____
d. Teachers have more discretion over instructional decisions than is typical in the district _____
e. Other (please specify): _____ _____
f. Other (please specify): _____ _____

Parents

a. Parents are required to participate in certain activities or for a certain number of hours _____
b. Parents sign a contract with school specifying their role in support of their child's learning _____
c. Parents may pay fees in lieu of participating in school activities _____
d. Parents have more influence over their child's education than is typical in the district _____
e. Parents pay fees for some school services _____
f. Other (please specify): _____ _____
g. Other (please specify): _____ _____

Students

a. Students must participate in community service projects _____
b. All students have individualized education plans _____
c. Students may proceed at their own pace to master skills and knowledge _____
d. Students take only one or two subjects at a time _____
e. Students are assigned to homogeneous classes in one or more subjects _____
f. Students who need extra help receive one-to-one tutoring by teachers _____
g. Other (please specify): _____ _____
h. Other (please specify): _____ _____

Programs

a Workplace instruction/apprenticeships are available to students _____
b. The school has campus-based service center(s) (e.g., health, social services) _____
c. Classes are smaller than is typical in the district _____
d. The school day is longer than is typical in the district _____
e. Classes are nongraded or involve students from across grade levels _____
f. There is no departmental structure along subject-matter lines _____
g. The school day is shorter than is typical in the district _____
h. Classes are offered on Saturdays _____
i. The length of class period varies substantially (e.g., one, two, three hours) _____
j. Cooperative learning is used by more teachers than is typical in the district _____
k. Other (please specify): _____ _____
l. Other (please specify): _____ _____

18. Does your charter school . . .

a.	Use paraprofessionals as instructors?	YES	NO
b.	Use parents or community members as instructors?	YES	NO

IV. Issues Raised by Charter Schools

19. Listed below are issues charter schools have raised. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each statement? (**Circle one numeral for each statement.**)

		Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree
a.	Some rules are still interfering with charter-school planning or operations	1	2	3	4	5	6
b.	The school attracts (or will attract) the best students from other schools	1	2	3	4	5	6
c.	New rules and authority structures are as constraining as the old ones	1	2	3	4	5	6
d.	Managing nonacademic services diverts energy from academics	1	2	3	4	5	6
e.	The school must meet higher accountability standards than other schools	1	2	3	4	5	6
f.	Some in the community feel the program could be done without a charter	1	2	3	4	5	6
g.	A charter means more work for teachers	1	2	3	4	5	6
h.	Teachers' authority in charter schools is being eroded by parents' increased influence	1	2	3	4	5	6
i.	The school receives (or will receive) less ADA funds than hoped	1	2	3	4	5	6
j.	Restrictive state rules are a great obstacle for charter schools	1	2	3	4	5	6
k.	The local teachers' union encourages teachers to work in charter schools	1	2	3	4	5	6
l.	One of the great obstacles to charter schools is district regulations	1	2	3	4	5	6
m.	Charter schools have opened (or reopened) complex issues related to accountability, liability, compliance, and/or equity	1	2	3	4	5	6
n.	A restrictive local union contract is a great obstacle to charter schools	1	2	3	4	5	6
o.	The state may not give charter schools the freedom needed for their programs to work	1	2	3	4	5	6
p.	The relationship between the school's governance body and the school board is unclear	1	2	3	4	5	6
q.	Charter schools are not really going to avoid rules and regulations	1	2	3	4	5	6
r.	If a charter school raises private funds to support educational programs, it risks being sued for providing special treatment to some students that is not available to others	1	2	3	4	5	6
s.	Securing funding to start or run the school is a major obstacle	1	2	3	4	5	6

V. District Support for Charter Schools

20. To what extent to you agree or disagree with the statements below? (**Circle one numeral for each statement.**)

	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree
a. My district has added (or will add) more conditions before it approves a charter-school petition	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Someone in the district helps the charter school(s) cut through red tape	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. Partially in response to the charter-school legislation, my district has liberalized policies pertaining to school restructuring	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. My district provides visibility and recognition for its charter school(s)	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. The leadership in my district is committed to facilitating what each charter school is proposing to do (or is doing)	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. My district maintains good communication with its charter school(s)	1	2	3	4	5	6
g. My district encourages other schools to adopt practices used in its charter school(s)	1	2	3	4	5	6
h. What my district permits a charter school to do depends largely on the opinions of auditors and/or lawyers	1	2	3	4	5	6

VI. Questions for Conversion Schools

21. Has your charter school been converted from an existing school or program? YES NO

IF NO, GO TO QUESTION 24

IF YES

↓

a. Did the existing or "parent" school apply for or receive any of the following? (**Circle one for each line.**)

	Did Not Apply	Applied for, Not Received	Received
California Distinguished School Award	1	2	3
SB 1274 planning grant	1	2	3
SB 1274 restructuring grant	1	2	3

b. Did the "parent" school receive competitive federal/state grants (i.e., funds it won by submitting written proposals to funding agencies)? YES NO

22. Please estimate the percentage of parents in the "parent" school who were involved in the following ways: (Circle best estimate on each line.)

a. Volunteered frequently at school	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80+
b. Regularly participated in PTA/PTO events	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80+
c. Set up home conditions that supported learning	0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80+

23. To what extent did each rule listed below get in the way of the "parent" school's change efforts?

	Not at all					Extensively
a. Rules related to school accreditation	1	2	3	4	5	6
b. Other state laws and regulations	1	2	3	4	5	6
c. School district regulations	1	2	3	4	5	6
d. Union contract provisions	1	2	3	4	5	6
e. Federal laws and regulations	1	2	3	4	5	6
f. Court rulings	1	2	3	4	5	6

24. We cannot capture all that you want to tell us about your school in this survey. We would appreciate additional comments about your school, its programs, or any other matters in the space below.

Thank you for completing and returning this questionnaire to SWRL, 4665 Lampson Avenue, Los Alamitos, CA 90720; 310/598-7661.

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